

Lutheran World Federation

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# Youth

m a g a z i n e

Fleeing  
toward  
the future



41

Young refugees tell their stories



*The Youth magazine is a publication of the Desk for Youth in Church and Society of the Lutheran World Federation Department for Mission and Development.*

*For more information and correspondence contact:*

*The Lutheran World Federation  
Desk for Youth in Church and Society  
Department for Mission and Development  
P.O. Box 2100 - 1211 Geneva 2 - Switzerland  
Telephone: (41-22) 791-64-37  
Fax: (41-22) 791-64-01  
E-Mail: pro@wcc-coe.org*

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*Editors: Anna-Karin Berglund, Ondrej Prostrednik, Birgitta Voltenauer  
Department for Mission and Development*

*Design: Angelika Kolb-Fichtler  
Production assistance: Janet Bond-Nash  
Office for Communication Services*

*Cover design: Edwin Hassink  
Cover photo: Don Edkins/WCC  
Caption: Young refugee with her baby — fleeing the 1994 massacres in Rwanda — close to Ngara in northwestern Tanzania.*

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*Fleeing toward the future*



## WHO IS A REFUGEE?

“A refugee is a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...”

*1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*



## FROM THE EDITORS

Many of you who read this magazine are in your twenties. In your lifetime, millions and millions of people have been forced to leave their homes and become refugees. Ten of these refugees have written articles for this issue. They are young people who had to flee in search of a better future.

This issue does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the problem of refugees. We simply want to give young refugees a chance to tell their stories. We hope that reading their articles will give you a greater understanding of what it means to be a refugee.

*"I am writing what I saw with my own eyes..."*

writes Isaac Yotam in one of the articles as he describes the horrifying experience he had as a child, at the beginning of his life as a refugee.

Each writer tells a different story but there are also many similarities in their articles. They write about the suffering in their native countries, about their separation from their families and about longing for home.

"I still feel sad whenever I think about Bosnia," says Dijana Ceric who fled Bosnia and now lives in the United States. "Even though I am happy living in Minnesota, I miss Bosnia more and more everyday." But returning home can also be very difficult. Fulayi Samiyombo, who recently has returned to his native Angola after twenty years in exile, now feels like a foreigner in his own country. Many refugees and returnees share his feeling of not belonging anywhere.

But there is also a sense of hope. Some of the writers have found better lives and can look forward to the future.

Being young, they may have found it easier to adapt to a new environment than older refugees have.

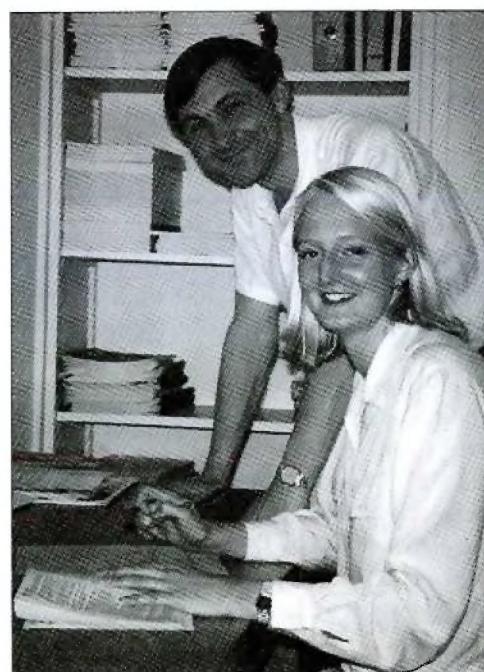
Faith in God has also been of significant support to some of them.

We want to thank these ten young refugees for their willingness to share their stories, some of which are very painful. Reading their articles opened our eyes. We hope their stories will do the same for you so that you may become accepting of the presence of refugees in your country.

Those persons who helped us get in contact with the writers, who collected the stories and who sent them to us are also to be thanked. Many of them work in the field programs of the LWF/Department for World Service.

We hope that in the next twenty years, fewer young people will have to flee in order to have a chance of a better future.

Ondrey Jan Van





## "AS CHRISTIANS WE HAVE A SPECIAL REASON TO CARE FOR REFUGEES..."

Ondrej Prostredník

Fleeing toward the future. This is the situation of many young people today. Recent developments in different parts of the world show that the constantly emerging conflicts will continue to force more and more people to leave their homes in order to survive, in order to have hope for a future.

This sad fact of our time is a challenge to those who understand the Bible as a foundation of their faith and who live in the church and are trying to express their belief through acts of love and solidarity. As Christians we have a special reason to care for refugees. Despite all our ties to our different homes, our countries and cultures, we understand this world not to be the place of our "permanent residence". (Philippians 3:20)

The understanding of the church as *comunio viatorum*, as a fellowship of those who are on their way, who are migratory, is very clearly present in the Bible. When talking about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants, the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes:

"They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:13-16)

The difficulties that many refugees have to face in their host countries are poignant evidence that we must emphasize this aspect of our Christian faith again and again. The doors of our homes should be opened to all strangers because we, ourselves, are strangers on our way to another world. We have no special right to possess the land, our country of residence and keep it only for ourselves. The earth belongs to the Lord (Psalm 24:1) so all people have an equal right to live in any part of it.

Situations of uprootedness are described throughout the entire Bible. The story of Abraham is the first.

"And God spoke in these terms, that his descendants would be resident aliens in a country belonging to others, who would enslave them and mistreat them during four hundred years. 'But I will judge the nation that they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.'" (Acts 7:6-7)

It was hunger that first forced the Hebrews to move. Abraham and his family left Canaan and migrated to richer country. Later, Isaac left his home and sought a living in the land of the Philistines for the same reason. He soon experienced mistrust and rejection from his host country.

Joseph was a young slave in Egypt when Pharaoh recognized his intelligence and invited him to save his country from starvation. It was Joseph's faith in God that made him strong and enabled him to remain faithful to the values of his own culture in spite of all temptation in the new country.

It also gave him the strength to see a future for himself despite slavery, oppression and uprootedness and granted him the ability to work for the benefit of his host country. From slave to powerful man in the highest ranks of society — that was the experience of Joseph. Once well established in Egypt, he sent an invitation to his father Jacob and his brothers to join him. Shortly afterward, they faced persecution and became slaves, too. The long story of Israelites as migrant people in the desert had begun.

Whatever the reason behind their departure, the uprooted are faced with a dual existential crisis vis-a-vis their identity and hopes for the future. What is left of their own identity when familiar support systems have disappeared, when recognition from the society they belonged to is of no value in the new country?

Through their experience of rejection, hopelessness and exploitation in a foreign land, God's people in the Old Testament learned at least three lessons:

- Aliens are easy prey to unjust treatment in a receiving society which tends to protect itself against "others".
- God condemns such behavior and considers that the right attitude toward strangers is a criterion of fidelity to God's Law. (Exodus 22:21: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.")



- God stands by the unprotected whom the Old Testament refers to as "the widows, the orphans and the aliens". But the aliens not only deserve compassion; they also deserve to be received into the community and given equal treatment. (Ezekiel 47:22: "You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel.")

Not only the people of the Old Testament, but also Jesus himself experienced what it means to be in exile. As a child he sought refuge with his family to escape Herod's threat and his words about having "nowhere to lay his head" became significant for his ministry.

He refused the false security of "royalty" and until his crucifixion identified himself with the poor, including aliens. Jesus identified himself with those not rooted in the "establishment" of his time and called his disciples to follow him.

This call also is directed to us. The presence of refugees in this contemporary world is a challenge to the church. One of the first actions at the LWF's founding assembly in Lund, Sweden, was to establish a Service to Refugees. Through its advocacy for refugee issues the LWF has helped to bring the services of the UNHCR, originally created for the European refugee crisis, to Third World refugees.

Today the LWF continues to do work for refugees in many parts of the world.

The articles in this issue reflect some aspects of this work. We want to support their authors, and those who live in similar situations, in hope for the future.

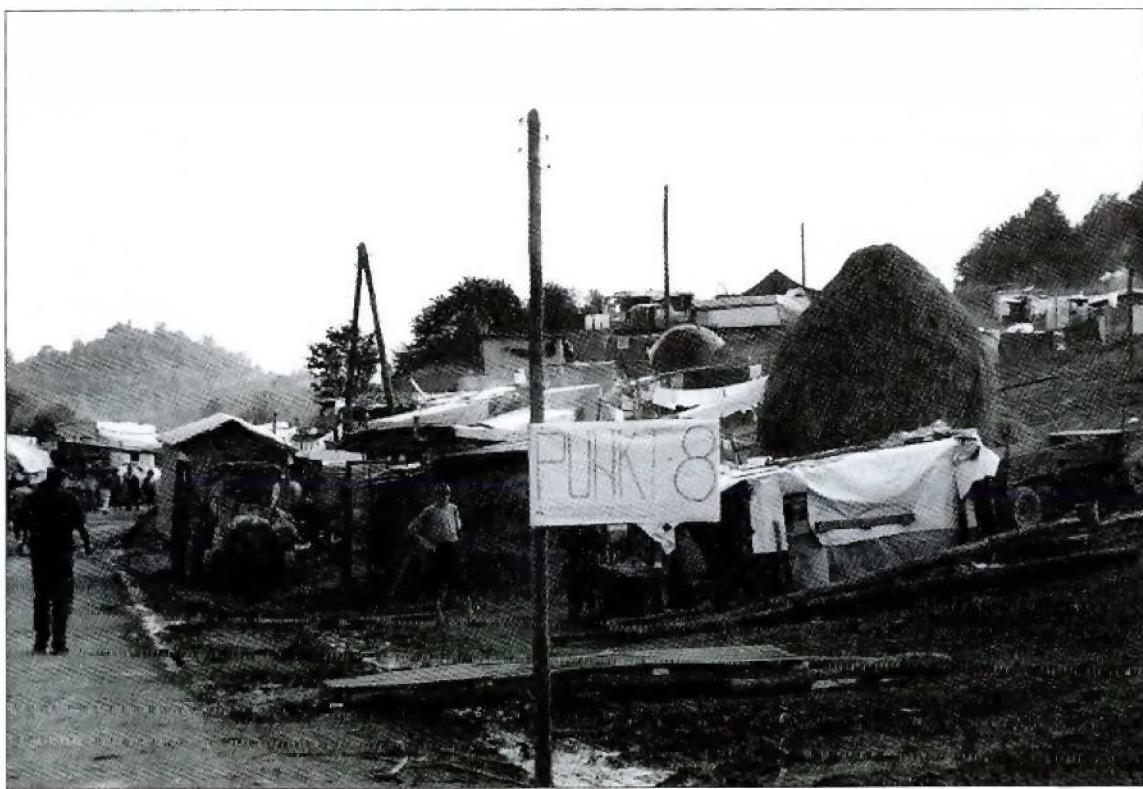


Photo: Karin Achleitner

*In the fall of 1995, this makeshift camp 80 kilometers south of the Croatian capital, Zagreb, sheltered 25,000 refugees. Many of them were supporters of a Bosnian rebel leader who proclaimed an independent state in western Bosnia. They fled when the area was retaken by the Bosnian government. Croatia did not want the refugees to stay, and they were afraid to return to Bosnia. The official definition of refugees did not apply to the people in this camp, making humanitarian aid difficult.*



## UPROOTED PEOPLE WORLDWIDE TOTAL ALMOST 50 MILLION

*One out of every 115 people in the world has been forced into flight, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The agency estimates that, including internally displaced people, the number of uprooted people worldwide is close to 50 million.*

When reading and hearing about displaced persons, you will come across different terms, such as refugees, asylum seekers, uprooted people and returnees. To help you through this jungle of terms, we have tried to find definitions for these commonly used words. But it is important to remember that behind every definition there are real people who have been forced to leave their homes.

*Uprooted people* is a broad term and refers to all those who are forcefully displaced from their land. Those forces may be violent conflict, persecution because of political opinion or religious belief, economic or social hardship, and environmental disasters as well as other forces.

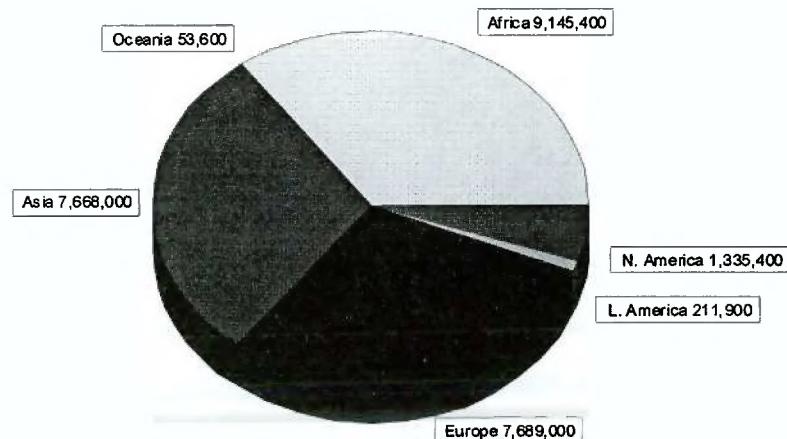
There is no generally accepted definition of the term. The World Council of Churches' Policy Statement describes uprooted people as persons who are:

*...compelled by severe political, economic and social conditions to leave their land and their culture...those forced to leave their communities: those who flee because of persecution and war, those who are forcibly displaced because of environmental devastation and those who are compelled to seek sustenance in a city or abroad because they cannot survive at home."*

All of the young people whose articles you may read in this issue are or were at one time *refugees*. The term refugee is more narrow than uprooted people. The single most widely used definition of a refugee can be found in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There are 126 states which are parties to the convention and its 1967 Protocol. According to the convention, a refugee is:

*"a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."*

### GLOBAL STATISTICS



*Total number of persons of concern to UNHCR including refugees, returnees and internally displaced people: 26,103,200.  
Latest available figures, Feb. 1996.*



TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN	MAIN COUNTRIES OF ASYLUM	REFUGEES
Afghanistan	Iran/Pakistan	2,675,000
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Croatia/F.R. Yugoslavia/Germany	1,019,000
Liberia	Guinea/Ivory Coast/Ghana	758,000
Iraq	Iran/Saudi Arabia	630,000
Sudan	Uganda/Zaire/Kenya	468,000
Somalia	Djibouti/Ethiopia/Kenya	452,000
Rwanda	Burundi/Tanzania/Uganda	387,000
Eritrea	Sudan	349,000
Sierra Leone	Guinea/Liberia/Gambia	325,000
Angola	Zaire/Zambia/Congo	324,000

February 1997

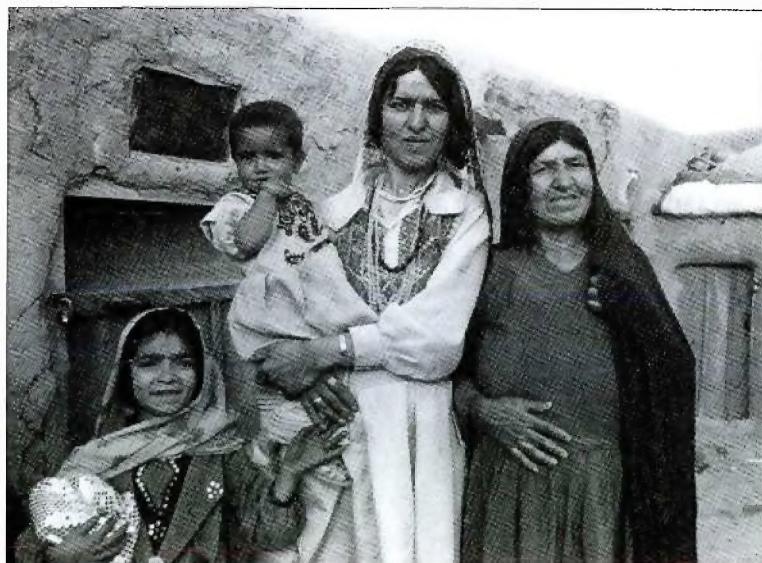
The UNHCR is the UN agency responsible for assisting the world's refugees. Some 26 million refugees receive protection and assistance from the agency.

An *asylum seeker* is a person who arrives in a certain country and claims refugee status. For a displaced person to be considered a refugee under the convention, he or she has to leave the country where he or she lives and enter into a country of which he or she is not a citizen because of fear of persecution. People who stay within the borders of their country but are forced to leave their homes suddenly and in large numbers because of war, serious human rights violations or disasters are called *internally displaced people*.

Former refugees who return to their country of nationality after some time in exile are *returnees*.

*International migrants* is a broad category which includes people who leave their home countries to find work and to live temporarily, and eventually even settle, in other countries. They leave for economic reasons rather than for fear of persecution.

Photo: A. Holmann/UNHCR



Afghan refugees in Shamsabad, Khorasan Province, Iran



## THE LWF AND REFUGEES

Since its establishment in 1947, the LWF has provided assistance to refugees. The federation is involved in, among other things, emergencies work, help to refugees in camps, repatriation and resettlement. The focus initially was on Europe. After World War II, one in three Lutherans was a refugee or a displaced person. Today, 10 of the Field Offices of the LWF Department for World Service work with refugees and returnees; in Angola, Eritrea, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### EMERGENCY RELIEF

Through *Action by Churches Together (ACT)*, the LWF and the World Council of Churches (WCC) work together to provide emergency relief. The ecumenical program began in 1995 and was created to improve coordination of emergency relief to better assist refugees and others in need.

During the past seven years, the LWF has been involved in major emergencies in Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zaire [Democratic Republic of Congo] and former Yugoslavia. LWF staff also has worked in emergency situations in Angola and Liberia.

### RWANDA

Even before the initiation of ACT, the LWF worked together with the WCC and other ecumenical partners to distribute food to hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees. In Rwanda itself, the LWF cooperated with the UNHCR to prepare for the repatriation of the refugees.

The Rwanda program now has ceased to be one for emergency relief and has become a regular LWF World Service Field Program focusing on rehabilitation and development.

### FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The LWF was involved in providing humanitarian aid to refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The program later was expanded to provide accommodation, the setting up of soup kitchens, help to farmers, and the repair of public buildings. After the signing of the Dayton Agreement in November 1995, the emergency program concentrated on the reconciliation process, especially involving young people, the problems of demobilized soldiers and war-wounded and the restoration of self-sufficiency.

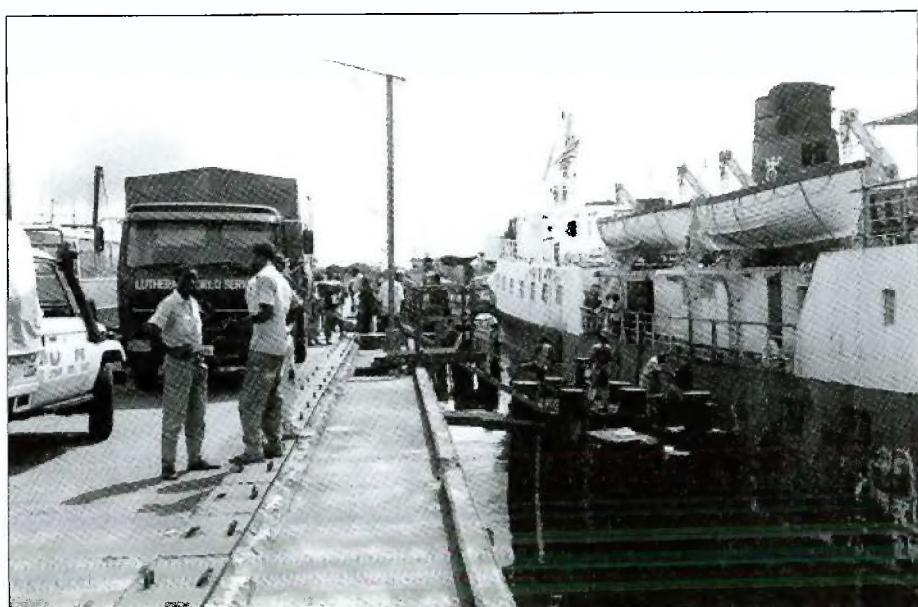


Photo: LWF/World Service

*Loading food and other necessities for refugees onto an LWF truck in Monrovia harbor, Liberia.*



Photo: LWF/World Service

*Liberian refugees queuing to receive food rations from the European Union and the World Food Programme, distributed by the LWF.*

### REPATRIATION

Over the years, the LWF has participated in efforts to repatriate and resettle refugees. With the assistance of the federation Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, Namibians and, indirectly, South Africans have returned to their own countries. A recent and successful program was the repatriation of Mozambicans from Zambia.

The LWF now is involved in the repatriation of Angolan refugees. The millions of land mines and massive destruction of the infrastructure after twenty years of civil war is a major obstacle to this effort. To clear roads and land and to educate returnees in how to avoid injury or death from land mines are important parts of the program.

### RESETTLEMENT

The LWF Office for Migration and Resettlement assists Lutheran churches as they resettle uprooted people, help to reunify families and provide travel loans and counseling. During the past eight years some 73,000 refugees and migrants were resettled from Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East with the assistance of Lutheran churches and Lutheran social service agencies.





## FROM PLACE TO PLACE...

*Murphy V.S. Anderson, Liberia*

*Murphy, 28, fled the civil war in his native Liberia. After first seeking refuge in Guinea and the Ivory Coast, he now lives in a refugee camp in Ghana.*

Ghana  
Liberia

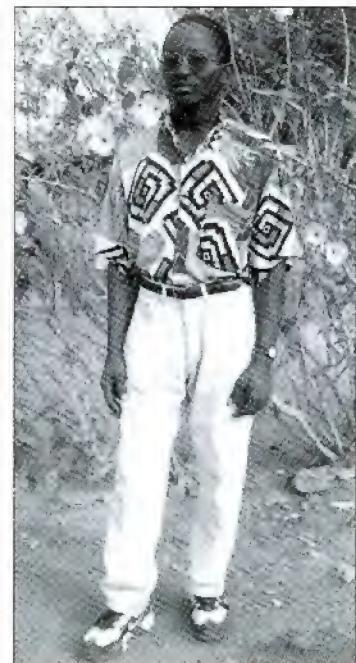
It was a calm Saturday afternoon and parents with their children were doing their Christmas shopping in our local markets. Families were busy preparing for the holidays when the national radio announced that there had been a military uprising in our country, Liberia. Charles G. Taylor was described as the leader of the rebellion. The news created a state of confusion for the entire country. Before long, armored tanks painted with camouflage colors appeared on the streets of Monrovia, the nation's capital. Soldiers of our own national army, dressed in warfare attire, were mounted on these tanks which were everywhere in the city.

My miserable life as a refugee that I presently find myself in started when I reached a decision to leave the country because of harassment, intimidation, insecurity, murder and conscription. I stayed in Liberia for three years before my dream to leave materialized. During those years, I lived with a group of men and women of my own age who called them-

selves *Freedom Fighters*. The name eventually became a complete contradiction to their activities. Finally, I was forced to flee the country because of conscription.

I began my life as a refugee on 16 September 1994 by entering into the neighboring country, Guinea. I thought that seeking refuge in a foreign country would make life better for me because the UN would take good care of me. Unfortunately, my dream of a better life turned out to be a miserable thing. Life in Guinea became so unpleasant and unbearable that I left for the Ivory Coast, hoping there would be some improvements in the areas of health, education and food, but that also turned out to be unsuccessful. There was no job to do so I could earn some money for myself and pay my school fees. The UNHCR offered little sponsorship and most of the English-speaking schools were very expensive for me as a young refugee. Again, I was compelled to leave, this time for Ghana.

A different life started in Budumburam Refugee Camp on 3 December 1995. In the beginning, Budumburam, unlike the places I stayed in Guinea and the Ivory Coast, appeared exciting, rewarding and peaceful but as time passed, my opinion changed. The camp has about 450 local units, built by the 14,000 refugees residing in the camp as well as some refugees who stay in other parts of Ghana. They rely on the



UNHCR, relatives and friends abroad for their livelihood. At the end of last year, the UNHCR put a stop to the supply of food rations and reduced sponsorship of students. Today, about 90 percent of us Liberians are not in school, including myself. Of them, 10 percent are older people who want to do graduate studies. These older people in the camp experience almost the same difficulties as the young do except that the young do most of the physical work in the gardens, needed to acquire our daily bread and make ends meet.

There are serious sanitation problems and a great risk to the health of the people in the camp. The medicines and medical attention that we can receive from



our local clinic, by paying some fees, have deteriorated considerably. There is hardly any pipe-borne water in our camp.

Residents have to use the polluted water from a nearby pond, place chlorine in it and allow it to set for about thirty minutes before they can use it. Some days we have to stay for hours at the pump waiting for water and it won't come. Prostitution, drug abuse, smoking and duping people have become commonplace. Our brothers and sisters, even our parents, have replaced serving God with these things in order to go on living.

Life as a young refugee is terrible, discouraging and frustrating. No school to go to, no jobs to work at. Others, like the UNHCR, have to decide what you will do and eat. This can be compared to confinement. I wish that I could get out of this kind of life soon. Sometimes, when things are hard and there is nowhere to turn, I could prefer death to this life but thanks be to God that I have come to know Christ and that he is my all in all.

## LIBERIA

Liberia is both a major refugee-producing country and a country of asylum. Because of the civil war which has torn the country apart since December 1989, some 750,000 Liberians have fled their country and have found shelter in Guinea (410,000), Ivory Coast (305,000), Ghana (15,000), Sierra Leone (4,700) and Nigeria (4,000). Liberia is thus the third-largest refugee-producing country in the world, after Afghanistan and Rwanda.

However, and despite the extremely tense security conditions in the country, Liberia is also a country of asylum. Some 120,000 people from Sierra Leone have fled to Liberia because of the fighting between the Sierra Leone regular army and the rebel Revolutionary United Front. Most of these refugees have settled near the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone, or around Liberia's capital, Monrovia.

Of Liberia's population of 2.5 million people, some 1.2 million have been forced to flee their homes for other parts of the country. About 800,000 of them are in or around Monrovia. The UNHCR estimates that about 623,000 Liberian refugees in other countries could decide to go home once peace is fully established in Liberia.

Source: UNHCR



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## **“BOSNIA WILL ALWAYS BE MY HOME”**

Dijana Ceric

*Bosnia. It sounds far away but it is close to me. Even though I left two years ago, I still vividly remember the last days I spent there. My name is Dijana Ceric. I was born in May of 1979 in a small town in northwest Bosnia, called Prijedor. I never knew what it meant to be sad until that day in April 1992 when war broke out in Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

Slowly, it was moving toward my city. Nobody believed that we would have fighting in Prijedor, too. But we did, two months later. I was thirteen then, and didn't know much about politics. But somehow I knew that was the main cause of war. What was once a happy community now became a site of death. In just two days, about 30,000 people were either killed or taken to concentration camps. From that day on we thought of leaving Bosnia. But to leave was not easy. So we waited and hoped that the war would stop and we would not have to leave. We could only hope while the war spread itself all over Bosnia.

As time went on, the atmosphere in my city became worse by the day. After three years of living in fear, we decided to leave. We were sponsored by our cousin who lives in the United States, so we knew where we were going. We left on 18 January 1995. With tears in my eyes I said good-bye and took one last look at the things I loved and the people I enjoyed being with. In just one quick second I lost everything. But, I still had a family and a chance to be happy again.

A group of 300 people left the city. We had been traveling for about two hours when the Serbian army stopped us. They asked for identification and wanted money. No one had any and after two hours they let us go. We entered Croatia after five hours of traveling. It was raining that day which

made things look even worse than they were. We were in Croatia for forty-four days. During that time we began to wonder what would happen to us once we reached the United States.

Bosnia. But that was already past, we had to move on. We were told that we would be leaving on June 5th. This time it wasn't so hard to leave.

We landed in New York at 3 o'clock on June 6th. From there we flew to Minneapolis. Many people from Bosnia came to the airport to welcome us. I was happier than I had been for a long time. Everything looked perfect but to start a new life was not as easy as it looked. We didn't speak English so my parents couldn't start working right away. We lived with my cousin for the first couple of weeks until we began to receive welfare and found an apartment of our own. Lutheran Social Services helped us a lot. As the days passed we got used to the way of life in the United States. A few months later, I started school and my parents went to work.

We left the camp on March 3. We were still on Serbian territory so we were not yet safe but I wasn't even scared anymore. If they wanted to kill us, no one was there to help us. There was nothing we could do but hope. And so hope we did. It rained again. We left Bosnia behind and I knew many years would pass by before we could go back. Sadness was the only feeling in our hearts.

Everyone thought we would not reach Croatian territory alive. No one spoke. It was like we were dead already. We reached refugee camp "Gasinci" soon afterwards. Things then started moving fast. We finished all the preparations that had to be done before departing for the United States. We were safe and life became normal again. Despite that, our thoughts were still in

*Dijana Ceric volunteers as an Ambassador for the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the national agency of Lutheran churches in the United States which ministers to uprooted people.*



## FADING MEMORIES OF HOME

Magda Ksenija, Croatia

### BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA

Throughout nearly four years of war, from 1991 until 1995, most of the remaining population of Bosnia-Herzegovina received aid from the UNHCR and other agencies.

By the time the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in December 1995, more than 1 million Bosnians remained displaced within the borders of the republic. At least 1 million more were living as refugees in some 25 other countries, primarily in neighboring republics of former Yugoslavia and throughout Western Europe. Under the Dayton Agreement, the UNHCR is responsible for the return of these people, either to their original homes or to areas of their choice.

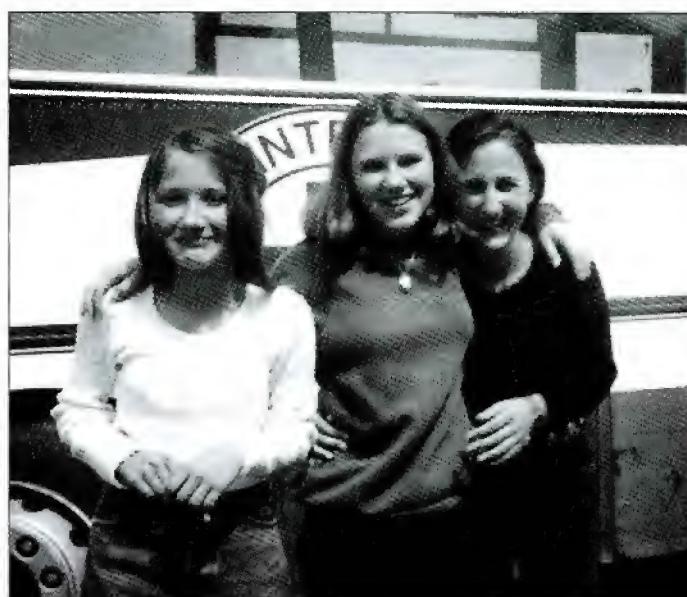
The massive repatriation program began in the spring of 1996. In its early stages, much of the focus was on helping the internally displaced persons in Bosnia to return or relocate. The return program is expected to take at least another year.

### CROATIA

Croatia hosts an estimated 170,000 Bosnian refugees. All were driven from their homes by the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The country also shelters approximately 180,000 Croat nationals who were forced to flee their homes during the 1991 Croatian-Serb war in Croatia, but who have remained within the borders of their own country. In addition, there are 60,000 displaced people (Serbs) in Eastern Slavonia, a UN-administered area on the border of Croatia and Serbia.

Source: UNHCR

*When tanks began to roll into the fields of their village in August of 1991, the Petromanovic family decided to leave their home in Baranja, now in the UN-protected area in the northeastern part of Croatia. They now live in Osijek, Croatia, where their daughter Dajana is about to finish her first year of high school.*



*After five years, Dajana (center) meets her relatives from Baranja at the UN checkpoint near Osijek.*

We often have the notion that war happens to uncivilized people in the world, and that victims are usually "savages." That is prejudice. War happens to civilizations - always! It happened unexpectedly to Croatia, and I can assure you Croatia is a civilized and European country whose artists, technicians and philosophers have helped shape European culture. It has created victims, not typical victims, but they are victims all the same.

One of them is Dajana Petromanovic, almost 15. Dajana is about to finish her first year of high school in Osijek where she lives with her parents, her 19-year-old brother and her grandmother in an old, three-room

house which was assigned to them as displaced persons.

Five years ago, she lived in the village of Popovac in Baranja, now in the UN-protected area in the northeastern part of the country. That the area is "protected", joke the 30,000 Croatians who are displaced from their homes in Baranja and East Slavonia, means that they cannot return to the part of Croatia where their homes are.

"I was nine years old when I had to leave Popovac. I still remember my friends, how we used to play there, and our house. We lived in my grandma's house and were just about to move into our new house in September. I was look-



ing forward to my own room," Dajana says.

Her family left Baranja on 18 August 1991. Overnight, tanks rolled into the surrounding fields. They counted the shells that were fired on the nearby Beli Manastir. The shadow of war, fear of the incredible things happening, and the shooting, robbed Dajana of sleep at night.

The family left earlier than other people in the area and first planned to go to Switzerland. Those plans were abandoned and for a while they stayed with relatives.

"It was almost like holidays at my aunt's and uncle's," Dajana recalls. "Mom wanted to return, but instead father joined us a week later."

Soon the holidays were over but, instead of going home, the Petromanovićs went to Zagreb, the Croatian capital. Dajana's father left to join the Croatian army in Osijek.

"This was something horrible. I was not used to living without my father. We watched TV and saw the news of bombings from Osijek. I knew my father was in great danger and there was nothing I could do about it."

Still, her daily life went on in what seemed to be a normal way. But when, in August 1995, she was woken up by nightmares of shells and sirens, Dajana understood that she had been left with lifelong memories of fear.

Being a refugee has left her with a feeling of humiliation, something she felt even as a child.

"It was not pleasant going to school in Zagreb. The children there thought we were different, not like them. Sometimes I felt as if they envied us for the help we were getting."

The other students did not know how people who have never needed outside help feel

"We are not so badly off as some other people I know," Dajana says.

But their life is not normal. They have left behind everything they had, and there is not much hope that they will find any of their things once they return to Popovac. Instead of clothes and the things a teenager needs and wants,

Dajana's family has to invest in kitchen equipment, bedding and furniture. For the older members of the family, there is also a sense of not belonging anywhere.

"My brother and I have adjusted well to the life in town," Dajana says. "Only grandma has a very hard time here. She is always thinking about her life in Baranja."

But Dajana cannot imagine living in Baranja again. Hers is now a different life and Popovac does not seem like home anymore. Not even pictures of that life have survived, just vague memories.

"Sometimes I am imagining living in my own room and that is wonderful," Dajana says.

when they are totally dependent on assistance from others.

"Although it is special to know that someone cares enough to help, you feel like a nobody, like a beggar. I prefer not to speak about it, and I tried not to go and get humanitarian help if it was possible," Dajana says.

Officially, the war is now over, but for Dajana things will never be as they were. Her life has changed. The family now lives in what appears to be a normal way in Osijek. Dajana and her brother go to school and share the same room. Her parents both work.

*fleeing toward the future*



## FAR AWAY FROM SOMALIA

Anna-Karin Berglund

*Hibo Said has not seen her family for over six years. She was separated from them when civil war broke out in Somalia. Alone, she made the long trip to Sweden where she now lives in a suburb of the capital Stockholm.*

Hibo was away from home when the war started. A few days earlier she had left her family in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, to go on vacation with her aunt. She had said goodbye, thinking that she would return in two weeks. But getting back to the city and her family was impossible, the roads were blocked and it was too dangerous to travel. For almost three years, Hibo knew nothing of what had happened to her parents and eight brothers and sisters.

The aunt and Hibo, then 16, managed to go to Kenya where the aunt and her husband lived. Until then, Hibo had never heard of a country called Sweden. Now, it was decided that she would go there. Relatives helped with money for the trip and a man arranged a passport and organized her travel arrangements. He would only take children with him on the journey to the North and Hibo's aunt had to stay behind. She promised that she would soon follow, but later decided to stay in Africa. Hibo, who had always had a large family around her, was now completely on her own.

The first days in the new country were frightening and confusing. A million thoughts rushed around in her head. Would she be sent back to the war? Where was her family?

What would happen to her? No one spoke a language she could understand. Sweden was cold.

"It was awful! I thought I had come to a new planet. I had never seen such tall buildings before, and all the new cars! I'd only met white people one at a time, never so many at once and I wanted to go right back home," she says, now able to smile when she talks about her first encounter with a country so very different from her own. "I was not pleasantly surprised."

After six years in Sweden, Hibo now speaks the language well. She lives in an apartment to the west of Stockholm. When I talk to her on the phone from Geneva I can hear her two-year old daughter Najma singing a Swedish nursery rhyme she learned at the day-care center. Outside it is minus ten degrees, Hibo tells me, and the last rays of the bleak winter sun are reflecting in the many windows of the big apartment complex. It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Somalia is very far away.

Forced away from her home country, here, Hibo has grown new roots. She has created a life very different from the one she would have led if she had stayed in Somalia. She believes that she has grown strong.

"You have to take care of yourself here," she says. "I have learned to live alone, something I would never have done in Somalia. I matured fast without my parents."

Photo: Christina Berglund



*Hibo and Najma at home*

Her appearance also has changed since she came to Sweden. During her first year, Hibo, a Moslem, wore long dresses concealing her arms and legs. In Somalia, her way of dressing had been less conservative, she wore short skirts and pants and not the traditional shawl. In Sweden, she covered her head for the first time.

"I used [the shawl] as protection and felt safer when I had it on," she explains. "When things became better, I took it off."

Although Hibo doesn't follow the strict Islamic dress code for women, she still practices her faith. She doesn't drink alcohol or eat pork and prays regularly.

"I didn't start to pray for real until I came to Sweden," she says. "I'm more religious here than I was in Somalia."

When Hibo first came to Sweden, she stayed at a refugee center and then went to a special



## Sweden

## Somalia

boarding school to learn the language. There, she met Eva, a teacher, who encouraged her to apply to a high school for adults where she could study for a diploma.

"I told her that I couldn't study with the other students who were Swedish, but she said: 'You are good, I know you can do it' and she was right", Hibo says. She sounds proud.

She was accepted into the school and studied there for two years, sharing an apartment with a Swedish girl, with whom she became good friends. She also met Najma's father, a Somali. Their daughter was born in 1995. After some time, they experienced serious problems in their relationship and now Hibo and Najma live on their own. Hibo is studying to become a nursing assistant, with the possibility of becoming a registered nurse.

"I have decided to study something useful, something that can help people when I come back to Somalia," she says.

The thought of returning home is always present. Hibo misses the love and support of her family but knows that the day when she will live in Somalia again is still far away. That the war is over doesn't mean that everything is fine again, she says, and describes the lack of doctors, teachers and school facilities, the

unemployment and chaos that prevail there. For Najma's sake, Hibo thinks it would be best to return only to visit.

"It won't be easy to go back with a child who has grown up here. For her, it is best to be here," Hibo says. "For her, this is home."

In the beginning of February this year, Hibo's father died of a stroke. It happened very suddenly. Only a week before, Hibo had received a letter from him, telling her that, considering the circumstances, he and the rest of the family were fine.

"It feels so difficult that I couldn't go to the funeral," she says.

Hibo's mother, who suffers from diabetes, and her brothers and sisters now live with relatives in northern Somalia. Their house in Mogadishu was destroyed in the war.

Hostility towards immigrants has grown in Sweden during the past few years, much depending on the economic recession which has brought with it unemployment and widespread discontentment. Some Swedes now feel that the government cannot afford to support immigrants and refugees. Hibo, too, has felt this animosity, mostly from older people. Some have come up to her in the street to tell her that she is living on their tax money and pensions. She thinks that they don't know why she had to leave, that they don't understand what it was like in Somalia during the war.

"Earlier, I was hurt by people's comments but now I'm used to it. I know why I came so it doesn't bother me so much. I would never have come if it wasn't for the war."

## SOMALIA

The overthrow of Somalia's Siad Barre regime in January 1991 triggered fighting among sixteen rival factions. Clan wars and a prolonged drought forced more than 900,000 Somalis to flee to neighboring countries. Some 400,000 of them crossed the border into Kenya alone.

The UNHCR's assistance program on the Somali border — and a much larger multinational effort led by the United States to bring order and end famine in much of Somalia during a two-year operation that ended in March 1995 — has by now allowed most of the refugees to return to their country.

There still are some 290,000 Somali refugees in Ethiopia, 126,000 in Kenya, 30,000 in Djibouti and Yemen. The UNHCR is conducting a voluntary repatriation program by land, air and sea, so that refugees who wish to can return to the relatively peaceful northern and southern areas of Somalia.

Source: UNHCR

When Najma grows older she will, like any child, ask her mother about the country she left when she was somewhere between childhood and adulthood.

"I will tell her that we are lucky to be in Sweden. When I think about how my friends who stayed in Somalia must have it, I think I am lucky."



## SEVEN YEARS IN AN ALIEN LAND

### THE PLIGHT OF BHUTANESE REFUGEES

*Keshav Nepal, Timai Refugee Camp*

*In the heart of Asia lies a small monarchy called Bhutan where peace and tranquillity have prevailed for many decades. The country has been a member of the UN since 1971 but seems only to pay lip service to its Charter since Bhutan is not questioned when disregarding it.*

There is political turmoil in Bhutan because of the oppressive laws of the Thimphu government in the capital. Human rights are violated and people are treated more like animals than human beings.

Oppression by the government was becoming unbearable and the first days of 1990 witnessed peaceful demonstrations condemning the government's harsh cruelty, demanding regard for human rights and democracy in the country. The political consciousness beginning to grow among the people was curbed when the government imprisoned the participants in the demonstration.

Torture in jails and expulsions from the country endangered the lives of the justice- and equality-loving Bhutanese. Soon, forced expulsion was initiated and today more than 130,000 Bhutanese citizens are refugees.

Appealing for shelter and political asylum, Bhutanese refugees traveled all the way through India until Nepal received their requests as legitimate, generously accepting them and showing understanding for their political privations. Today, some 90,000 Bhutanese refugees are accommodated at eight different UNHCR-managed camps in eastern Nepal. The rest are scattered over India and Nepal.

Young Bhutanese refugees have been especially critical of the corruption and harsh policies of the Bhutanese government. They are striving to safeguard democracy and human rights in Bhutan through various youth organizations.

The government of Nepal also wishes to solve the problem of Bhutanese refugees and is looking into the matter carefully. But, bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan so far have been unsuccessful.

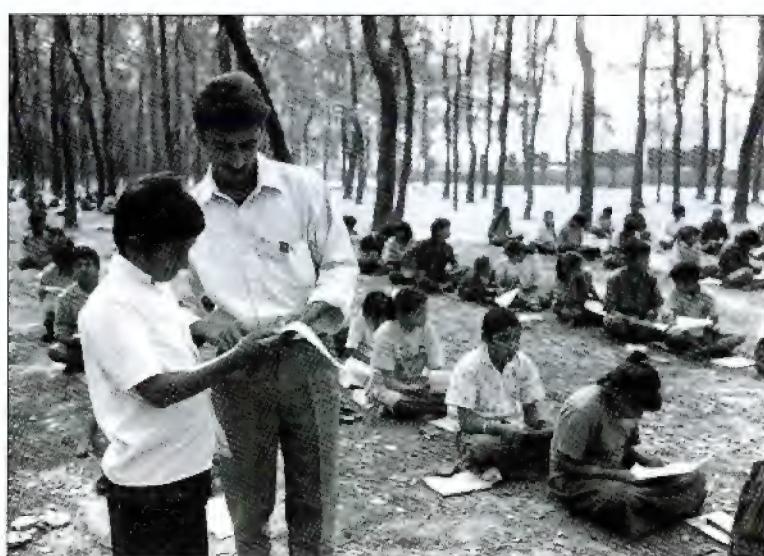


Photo: A. Hollmann/UNHCR

*Refugees from Bhutan, Beldangi I Camp, Jhapa District, Nepal*



The LWF Department for World Service and the Nepalese Red Cross were the first two agencies to extend helping hands to the refugees. To improve the situation of the youth and to develop the refugee community, the LWF/WS funds vocational training programs for Bhutanese youth. Assistance also has been provided by several other aid agencies. Education of children and adults is provided in the camps by some international organizations.

One of the many problems confronting the Bhutanese refugees is housing. The bamboo-mat walls of the houses does not adequately protect the people from nature: the severity of winter and summer downpours. The difficult conditions have led to a high mortality rate. The people in the camps live in a very congested and unhealthy environment. Diseases like tuberculosis and cholera are common.

The lack of an adequate and balanced diet lowers normal birth weights and the growth of many children.

The most critical issue of today is the increasing number of psychiatric problems due to mounting mental pressures on the refugees. Most of the older people have nothing to keep themselves occupied with. All day long they dream of the land, the belongings and the country they left behind.

Nepal Bhutan

The Bhutanese refugees in Nepal now have lived for seven years in an alien land. Many struggle with feelings of inferiority. The breakdown of moral values is widespread. Seeing no other solution to their problems, Bhutanese refugees have come to the conclusion that they must return to their own country.

The young refugees set up a program known as the Appeal Movement Coordinating Council (AMCC) and organized a march from the refugee camps in Nepal to the Bhutanese capital, Thimphu, to submit an appeal to the king. But with assistance from the government of India, the Bhutanese authorities managed to stop the march.

We, young Bhutanese refugees consider ourselves unlucky because we do not get an opportunity to live as responsible youth serving our own motherland. We have the will, the courage and the spirit, but no means. Money has become a hurdle between us and our duty. The only positive thing we experience as young refugees is solidarity with others. Together we're headed toward an obscure future.

### BHUTAN AND NEPAL

Some 90,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from southern Bhutan are accommodated in seven camps in eastern Nepal, in the districts of Jhapa and Morang. The bulk of the camp population are of Nepali origin and claim to have Bhutanese citizenship or long-time residence in Bhutan. Many of them allege that they were targeted for human rights abuse, and/or were deprived of their property and nationality, prior to their departure from Bhutan. According to Nepalese authorities, a further 15,000 are living in Nepal, outside the camps, unassisted by UNHCR.

The camps are clean and orderly, and provide basic assistance such as health care, education and skills-training projects that help the refugees and asylum-seekers maintain their ability to earn some income.

Since the beginning of 1993, Nepal and Bhutan had several bilateral meetings to seek solutions to the problems of this population, concentrating particularly on the issue of their citizenship, or "categorization". However, the situation of this caseload remains at an impasse. It is expected that the bilateral talks will continue.

Source: UNHCR



## RETURNING TO EL SALVADOR

Maria Carla Bonilla Leiva

*Maria, now 16, became a refugee when she was only three days old. After several years in neighboring Honduras, she and her family returned to El Salvador where the war was still going on. Today, there is peace and the village has a school, water supply and electricity but is struggling with social problems.*

We Salvadorans lived in a difficult situation during the civil war. Most people were poor and had no education, no drinking water, no health centers, and no electricity. If someone fell sick, he or she had to be carried on a stretcher over 19 km (12 miles) to the health center. The majority of people had no land of their own to cultivate. The reason why they moved the people out of here was because the rich wanted to keep the poor as slaves.

The people worked for the rich but received salaries that were unjust. The peasants' rights were violated and when they organized themselves to protest against the injustice, the rich began to murder and kill them, accusing them of being communists and guerrillas. When the peasants continued to claim their rights, they continued to murder them.

The soldiers of the armed forces forced us out of Santa Marta, a canton of the Department of Cabañas. They killed people just as they pleased. They killed the elderly, pregnant women, children, the defenseless. As people saw what was happening they decided to flee. When the soldiers saw us leaving, they came after us and bombed us from planes and helicopters. We had to cross the River Lempa where many people drowned. Others died when they were hit by bombs and mortars.

Honduras  
El Salvador

Those who could swim helped the ones who could not, using sticks, lassos, tires and rocks. The people who managed to cross the river and save their lives arrived in a hot valley. There, many died because they were not used to such a climate and some were killed by Honduran soldiers.

This is what I was told, because at the time we fled I was only three days old. My mother carried me in her arms. Three days earlier she had given birth to me and my twin sister, but my twin sister died. It was hard on my mother to walk in her condition and with the sorrow she carried. She was scared to be hit by a bomb or mortar. She had four other children but only two were old enough to walk. The others had to be carried, one by my elder sister and one by my father.

To live as refugees as we did in the camp of Mesa Grande in Honduras was hard because it was like living in a prison. The

Honduran armed forces set up restrictions on where people could go and if someone went past those limits, they captured or killed him or her. They would not let us out to visit other camps or people. We also felt very unhappy because this was not our place of origin, not our home. We were hoping that the war would end so that we could finally return home. We didn't feel well because we were locked up and felt desperate.

But there were positive things about being a refugee. Everyone worked together. People had communal vegetable gardens and the harvest was shared among us. Thanks to international aid, workshops where people could learn tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry and dressmaking were organized. When people had been trained they could produce their own things. Food for malnourished children and the elderly was prepared in a special center. There also were schools where the children could study. That was very useful to me. The teachers were chosen from among our own people. They had no special education as teachers, but what they had learned they shared with us. No one had a higher level of education than grade 6.

One of the biggest constraints was our lack of liberty to go outside the camp, but there were the recreational centers and a football field where the children could play.



## CENTRAL AMERICA

In the 1970s and 1980s, Central America was rocked by war, civil strife and widespread human rights abuses that forced nearly 2 million people from Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua to leave their homes. By the mid-1980s, nearly all sides had grown weary of conflict and were beginning to search for a solution that would encompass the whole region — asylum countries as well as those ravaged by war.

In 1989, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua adopted a five-year plan (1989-1994) to find solutions to the problems of uprooted people in the strife-torn region. The adoption of this plan was made possible because of the political agreement toward peace that was signed by the five Central American presidents in Esquipulas in 1987.

More than 1.9 million people were targeted for help. By the end of the five-year plan, the program had helped more than 118,000 refugees (70,000 Nicaraguans, 30,000 Salvadorans and 18,000 Guatemalans) return voluntarily to their homelands. Thousands more who decided not to go home were integrated in asylum countries. Closed refugee camps were eliminated.

Source: UNHCR

A negative consequence of the international assistance was that some youth became used to everything being taken care of. They now prefer to remain dependent rather than to actively work.

We returned from Honduras on 10 October 1987. We decided to go home despite the ongoing war. When we arrived, the armed forces and the guerrilla were fighting. We lived between the two sides. When they fired at each other, we were in the middle and several people were hit by bullets or mortars.

The helicopters bombed very close to our village. We tried to hide behind the walls of the houses, in piles of firewood, and under the beds to avoid being hit. I was very scared and worried. The houses were simple, made of mud and sheets of metal, no fit protection. The bullets could easily pass through the mud walls. International aid organizations came with medicine and food, but the armed forces did not allow them to come to Santa Marta.

When people came from San Salvador or other places, they did not let them through and even captured them. People from here went to claim those who had been captured.

We continued living in this way until the Peace Accords were signed.

Today, I am studying in 7th grade at the school of Santa Marta. The situation is quite different because there is no more war. What affects us now is delinquency, alcoholism, drug addiction, lack of morality and a male-dominated society. Now we have a school, a medical clinic, electric lighting and water. The young people are organized in a youth club of which I am vice-president. I also work in a mental health program trying to address our social problems. Furthermore, we have a communal radio station for which I am practicing to become an announcer.



Photo: LWF/W S El Salvador

*Maria, as a child, washing clothes in Santa Marta, El Salvador, 1991*



## REGRESANDO A EL SALVADOR

*Maria Carla Bonilla Leiva*

*Maria ahora 16 años, llegó a ser refugiada cuando sólo tuvo tres días de edad. Después de varios años viviendo en Honduras, regresó con su familia a El Salvador donde continuaba la guerra. Ahora hay paz y la comunidad dispone de una escuela, de agua y de electricidad, pero está luchando con problemas sociales.*

Nosotros, los salvadoreños, vivíamos en una situación difícil, estando en una guerra civil. La mayoría de la gente era pobre y no tenían escuela, agua potable, centros de salud, que eléctrica. Cuando alguien se enfermaba tenían que llevarlo en hamaca hasta el centro de salud, que tenía que recorrer unos 19 kilómetros de pie. La mayoría de gente no tenía tierra propia donde trabajar. El porque sacaron a la gente de aquí fue porque la gente más rica quería tener a la gente como esclavos.

La gente trabajaba para ellos y los salarios que les daban no eran justos. Les violaban derechos a los campesinos y cuando los campesinos se organizaban para protestar en contra de la injusticia que había, fue que ellos empezaron a asesinar, a matar, a los pobres, tratándolos de comunistas, de guerrilleros. La gente no más estaba luchando para respetar sus derechos y sobrevivir. Y porque la gente luchaba fue que empezaban a asesinar.

Los soldados, la Fuerza Armada, nos sacaron de aquí, de Santa Marta, un cantón en el Departamento de Cabañas. Ellos asesinaban a mucha gente, a quien les daba la gana. Si hubiera un anciano, lo mataban, mujeres



Photo: LWF/WS ES Salvador

*Maria, today 16, holding her niece*

*Maria, 16, con su sobrina*

embarazadas, niñas y niños, que no se podían defenderse. La gente, mirando la situación, lo que decidió fue irse. Y cuando los soldados vieron que nosotros nos íbamos, ellos nos sacaron a bombazos, trajeron aviones y helicópteros, y tiraban rocketazos adonde estabamos. Tuvimos que cruzar el Río Lempa, y allí murió mucha gente ahogada, otros que les caían bombas, y también morteros. Allí la gente que podía nadar pasaba del río a la gente

que no podía, en palos de huerta, por lazos, llantas, y en pedazos de madera. La gente que logró pasar, que se salvó, llegamos a un valle donde es muy caliente. Y allí murió bastante gente porque no estaban acostumbrados al clima y también porque los soldados hondureños asesinaban a la gente. Eso es lo que a mí me han contado, porque yo en el tiempo de la guerra, cuando nos fuimos, tenía tres días de nacida. Mi mamá me llevaba en sus bra-



zos. Tenía tres días de haber dado a luz mí y ami hermana gemela, pero ella murió al solo nacer. Para mi mamá fue duro, porque estando en esa situación tenía que ir caminando y sentía aflicción. Tenía miedo que le cayera una bomba o un mortero. Tenía cuatro niños más que mí, solo dos podían caminar y las otras dos que no podían caminar, una la llevaba mi hermana mayor y la otra mi papá.

Vivir como refugiados, así como vivíamos nosotros en el campamento de refugio de Mesa Grande de Honduras, fue duro, porque estábamos como que estar en una cárcel. Las fuerzas armadas hondureñas habían puesto límites hasta donde la gente podía llegar, y si se pasaban de los límites, la capturaban o la asesinaban. No podíamos salir a visitar otros puestos o otra gente porque no nos dejaban. También nos sentíamos desesperados, porque ese no eran nuestro lugar de origen. No es como estar en el lugar donde uno ha vivido, y también nosotros estábamos esperando que la guerra se terminara en nuestro lugar de origen, para poder regresar de nuevo. Por esa parte nosotros nos sentíamos mal allí porque queríamos estar encerrados y nos desesperábamos. Pero, por otra parte, fue bonito, estar así refugiados, porque toda la gente trabajaban en comunidad. Hacían hortalizas comunales, y los productos que sacaban se los repartían a toda la gente. También, con la ayuda internacional, había talleres de aprendizaje. Primero llegaron a capacitar a la gente, y luego la gente podía hacer cosas que le servía a la misma gente. Estos talleres eran de sastrería, zapatería, carpintería, y corte y confección. Había un centro donde hacían alimentos para los niños desnutridos y ancianos. También habían escuelas populares donde los niños podían es-

tudiar. Los grados que se daban eran hasta el sexto grado. A mí me sirvió mucho la escuela porque yo estudiaba. Los maestros eran la misma gente de allí. Ellos no tenían ningún conocimiento como maestro, pero lo que ellos aprendían lo compartían con la gente. Ninguno tenía más de sexto grado.

Una de las mayores dificultades era que no teníamos libertad para salir, pero una ventaja era que había centros recreativos, y canchas de fútbol donde los niños podían jugar sanamente. Una consecuencia de estar dependiendo de la ayuda internacional es que algunos jóvenes se acostumbraron a que todo se les regalaba y ahora siempre quieren ser dependientes y no quieren trabajar.

Regresamos de Honduras el 10 de octubre de 1987. Decidimos retornar a pesar de que en nuestro lugar de origen todavía había guerra. Cuando vinimos aquí, había enfrentamientos entre la fuerza armada y la guerrilla, y nosotros estábamos viviendo en medio de dos fuegos. Cuando se enfrentaban las dos fuerzas, nosotros quedamos en medio, y salía bastante gente herida por balas y por esquirlas de morteros y granadas. También venían los helicópteros a ametrallar y a veces cerca de la comunidad caían bombas. Nosotros tratábamos de defendernos, cubriéndonos en las paredes de la casa, en prensas de leña y escondiéndonos debajo de las camas, para que no nos fuera a caer ni una bala. Yo sentía mucho miedo y me sentía muy preocupada también. Las casas eran bien sencillas, de tierra y de lámina, y no servían para protegerse. Con las paredes que eran de tierra, había que tener mucho cuidado porque podía pasar una bala. Venían ayudas internacionales con medicina y alimentos, y la fuerza armada, no dejaba que pararan para Santa Marta, o si venía la gente de San Salvador o otro puesto,

no la dejaban pasar los retenes, y a veces la capturaban. La gente acá iba a reclamarlos hasta que entregaran a las personas capturadas. Y en esa situación vivimos hasta que firmaron los Acuerdos de Paz.

Actualmente me encuentro estudiando séptimo grado aquí en la escuela de Santa Marta. La situación es más diferente porque hoy no hay guerra, pero lo que nos afecta es la delincuencia, el alcoholismo, la drogadicción, el maltrato y el machismo. Ahora tenemos escuela, tenemos clínica, luz eléctrica y agua. Los jóvenes estamos organizados en una directiva de jóvenes, en la cual yo soy vice-presidente. También estoy trabajando como facilitadora en el programa de salud mental para ayudar a solucionar los problemas sociales. También tenemos una radio comunitaria en la cual yo estoy practicando para ser locutora para trabajar en ella.

*Planning  
toward  
the future*

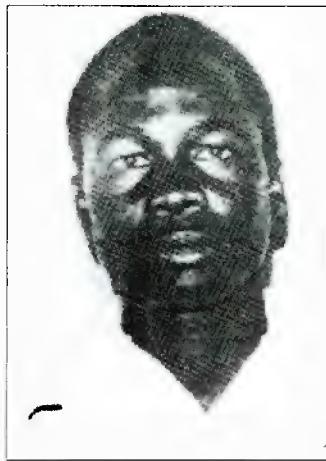


## "WITH MY OWN EYES..."

Isaac Yotam, Mozambique

*My name is Isaac Yotam. I am twenty-five years old. I come from a family of seven. We all live at Mteme Village where we have a field of almost two hectares. Our main activity is working in the field. When I'm off work, I usually go hunting with dogs.*

I'm writing about what I saw with my own eyes. When war broke out in my area, I saw soldiers coming to our home, asking my father if he knew where the Frelimo rebels were. He told them that he didn't know of these people. Then they said "you are Frelimo" and killed him and told us not to cry because if we did they would kill us all. They went to look for my uncle who was a Frelimo soldier, but they didn't find him. Then they came back and killed all our goats, pigs and chickens and ate them. After eating, they took my father's body and cut it into pieces. Then another Renamo group came, brought some women and started to sleep with them in our presence. Those who had their wives there were told to have sexual in-



tercourse with them. While they were doing that, Frelimo soldiers came and started shooting. That is when we found a chance to run away.

We were not able to take any of our things. Our houses were on fire. Everything was burning. That day, we went to the mountains where we found other people who were also running away from the bullets. From there we decided to go to Malawi. On our way to Malawi, we had no food, we ate mushrooms. Some of the people running away were naked. Renamo soldiers had taken their clothes.

Seven days later, we reached the first village in Malawi. When we asked for food from the village headman, he told us that he had no food to give to people running away from the war. He even asked us to show him where this war we were fleeing from was. It was painful that he didn't

### MOZAMBIQUE

More than 1.7 million Mozambican refugees, who fled one of Africa's longest civil wars, have now returned to their country. This return to Mozambique, completed in October 1995, was the largest repatriation exercise the UNHCR has ever conducted in Africa.

Repatriation to Mozambique followed the signing of a peace agreement in October 1992 which ended 16 years of civil war. The conflict had claimed more than a million lives and forced a quarter of the country's 16 million people to flee their homes. A large number of the refugees returned on their own from countries where they had found asylum. However, using buses, trucks, trains and even boats, the UNHCR transported about 350,000 of the refugees home — those who were particularly vulnerable, or who lived in very remote areas. By the time elections were held in Mozambique, a majority of the refugees were back in their country.

In all, 1.3 million Mozambican refugees returned from Malawi; 241,000 from Zimbabwe; 23,000 from Zambia; 17,000 from Swaziland; 67,000 from South Africa; and 32,000 from Tanzania.

Source: UNHCR



believe us, but there was nothing we could do. Other people in the village said that we came to look for fields to cultivate because there are a lot of thorns in Mozambique. They thought that we were not able to farm the land there. "Tell them to go back to their country," they said. Because of these insults my uncle Yotam, the person who gave me his name, went back to Mozambique. When he got there, he and his wife were killed.

After two months, Red Cross staff came and gave us a place where we built a house, but we were told not to try to open up fields. The Red Cross then gave us food, blankets, pots and cooking oil. If we wanted to buy something, we did some work in exchange. We lived like that until the war was over in Mozambique, in 1992. I was then twenty-one years old and my friends and I heard about the end of the war on the radio.

Finally, peace came to Mozambique and those who wanted to could go home. My friends and I didn't wait for the buses which took people back.

We left our families in Malawi and went to see if the war was really over.

*When we reached home we found that it had turned into true bush, with tall elephant grass, but we could say "our house was here" and we could see pieces of broken clay pots. We didn't sleep there because of the elephants and lions. Sometimes we were also frightened by leopards and snakes.*

Instead, we went to the Chidzolomondo Center where displaced people were gathered. We were given food by the Mozambique Red Cross. We stayed there for a week building houses of grass.

We stayed because we were weak, physically and mentally. We also could not go very far because of the land mines. Rockets of bazookas and grenades were everywhere.

The bones of people who died during the war were found under the trees, in wells, near the river banks. I have no good words to express my feelings about what I saw, but it was sorrowful.

When we finished building our houses, we went to Malawi to get our families. Starting life again in Mozambique was hard, there were no schools, no clinics, no roads.

They were all destroyed during the civil war. Rivers had no water because of drought. Food was scarce even though the Red Cross was supplying us with some.

Then, in 1993 and 1994, the LWF started to reach our area. Clinics, schools, roads, bridges and wells were rebuilt. At that time we began to feel like human beings again. In 1995 and 1996, because of good rains, we had a plentiful harvest again and our lives returned to normal.



Mozambique



## REFUGEE RETURNS AS TEACHER FOR DISPLACED VIETNAMESE

*Tran Huu Danh, Vietnam*

*In 1978, Tran Huu Dahn and his family left Vietnam in a rickety boat, in hope of a better future. After many years in Holland, he is now back in Asia, working as a teacher in a detention center for Vietnamese asylum seekers in Hong Kong.*

The blue sky quickly turned grey as clouds moved across the sky followed by deafening crashes of thunder. Then, we all got wet from big raindrops and sea water as the thunderstorm whipped up huge waves against our boat. I could hear the children crying. I did not cry, although I was scared. Maybe I was too seasick or too hungry to cry.

We were very fortunate to go ashore in the Philippines safely. Many others were not as lucky. Like us, they fled after the fall of the US-backed South Vietnam to North Vietnam, which was supported by the Soviet Union. They were robbed and raped by pirates. Some even lost their lives while trying to escape. Our voyage took about two weeks, but it seemed like three months. Unlike now, we were automatically recognized as genuine refugees and spent only a few months in a refugee camp which was not surrounded by barbed wire, waiting to be resettled in a non-communist country. This happened in December 1978. My whole family risked their lives at sea to search for a better future, especially for myself and my siblings, without knowing what was awaiting us in the "Promised Land."



*Tran with young students in a detention center for Vietnamese asylum seekers in Hong Kong*

I will never forget 23 March 1979. It was the day I arrived in my "Promised land": Holland. I was only eleven years old then. I did not know anything about Holland except that it had a very good football team. It was about -2°C when I arrived there, too cold for an Asian. The sky was dark and it felt like winter. The country, its people and language were very strange to me but I felt excited. On my very first day in Holland it even snowed and I could not wait to rush out of my room to the backyard to play with the snow which I had seen only on TV before. After playing with the snow I went back inside to go to bed. Even though it was daytime I felt very sleepy because of the time difference between

tween Holland and the Philippines.

I woke up the next morning to find that the refrigerator was full of ready-made food, which was bought by a Dutch family who volunteered to help us adapt to our new life. This family was extremely kind to us and they taught us a lot. They sometimes took us in their car to places they thought we should see and helped us with filling out forms and took us to shopping malls, markets and supermarkets. For the first six months in Holland, we stayed with other Vietnamese families at a temporary place, before we could live on our own. We were told that there were only about three hundred Vietnamese living in Holland at the time. During that time, the children went to



## HONG KONG/VIETNAM

Starting in the mid-1970s, hundreds of thousands of people began to leave Vietnam in rickety boats, braving sharks and pirates, to reach the shores of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. They were the boat people. For years, the UNHCR worked to ensure that every one of them would be able to start a new life in a country of resettlement in the West. By 1989, 14 years after the change of regime in south Vietnam, resettlement countries were increasingly impatient with the continuing outflow, and the countries of Southeast Asia threatened to send back new arrivals. Meanwhile, it became clear that not every boat person was fleeing actual persecution. Many were economic migrants.

In 1989, the first-asylum countries in Asia, resettlement countries in the West and the UNHCR agreed on a Comprehensive Plan of Action. Every asylum seeker from Vietnam would be screened individually for refugee status and given the right of appeal. Since the countries of Asia refused to accept them permanently, all those who were refugees would receive resettlement in the West. Non-refugees would ultimately have to return to Vietnam.

A total of 195,833 asylum seekers from Viet Nam went to Hong Kong. To date (1996), almost 140,000 have left for resettlement in the West, and 20,000 remain in Hong Kong. Of that group, 19,000 are classified as non-refugees, who live in closed camps; the Hong Kong authorities have made it clear that they expect this group to return home. Some 1,400 recognized refugees remain in Hong Kong. Some have a serious criminal or drug history, and no resettlement country will accept them.

When people opt to return to Vietnam, the UNHCR gives them substantial financial assistance (equivalent to one year's salary per family member), and in addition has set up its most extensive monitoring program to visit returnees. The Vietnamese authorities have not persecuted this group, or subjected the returnees to discrimination.

Source: UNHCR

school to learn the new culture and the language while the parents stayed at home. Every now and then excursions were arranged for us to see more of Holland.

At school I had a lot of problems with the language. I could not understand the teachers and students and they did not understand me. But I overcame this problem quite quickly. Every day, classmates surrounded me in the playground and I tried to communicate with them in my broken Dutch. None of my classmates had ever heard of Vietnam before and they thought that I was Chinese. Being the only Asian among all those white people was strange but I never

### Hong Kong

felt that I was discriminated against. This helped me feel part of their group. I was invited by friends on several occasions to their homes to meet their parents. They were all very nice to me.

My friends often asked me to play football with them and we really had good times. However, I wished that there were more Vietnamese of my own age with whom I could talk or play. I sometimes felt lonely, not because I was different, but because the games they played, their customs and habits were very different from mine. I could not share all my feelings with them because of the language barrier. I knew from the very beginning that no matter how long I was going to live there, I could only integrate myself into the community up to a certain point. I never felt ashamed to tell people where I am from or why I was there. Still, I was very afraid of being



looked down upon because of my background and I was determined to work very hard at school, not only to earn respect, but also bearing in mind the reasons why my family left Vietnam and the risks we took in doing so. I usually spent a lot more time studying and doing my homework than other students. As a result, I was very often rewarded with good marks. After years of hard work, my dream came true when I finally graduated from college in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in Business Economics.

By chance, I got a job as a teacher in one of the few remaining detention centers for Vietnamese asylum seekers in Hong Kong. As these people arrived in Hong Kong after 1988 they had to go through a screening process which was set up by the Hong Kong government for refugee status determination. Since this screening policy was introduced, many asylum seekers have failed to prove themselves to be genuine political refugees, and thus they are left with a choice to either go back to Vietnam voluntarily, or eventually be sent back under the Orderly Repatriation Program (ORP) implemented by the Hong Kong government.

Those who are still detained in the camps continue to endure many difficulties and hardship. They live in overcrowded huts with inadequate facilities and children do not get proper schooling. Inmates who have some educational background are hired by Non-Governmental Organizations to teach the children. As a result of lack of teaching experience and materials, the education programs do not reach sufficient standards. Children are unenthusiastic to attend school regularly and are far behind other children of their age in their education. School hours are usually interrupted by camp searches, camp transfers and ORP operations.

Photo: Kaspar Gaugler/UNHCR



*A small boat carrying Vietnamese refugees arrives in Malaysia.*

Adults are also provided with education programs. But, they do not make the most of the services as they are constantly thinking about their murky future. Their daily activities are extremely routine.

At certain times of the day people queue up to get food which they recook to suit their personal tastes. As people live in a confined area surrounded by barbed wire they have no privacy. Teenagers easily become involved in sexual relationships which often lead to unwanted pregnancies. Due to mental depression, some people have physically harmed themselves and in extreme cases some even committed suicide.

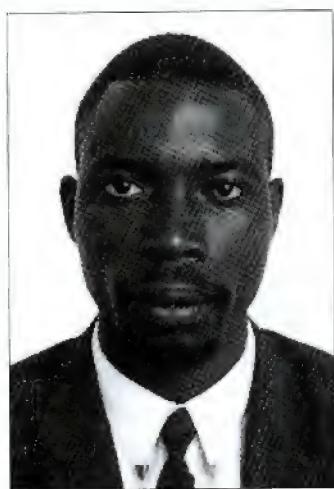
In general, life in the camps is difficult and dangerous. People suffer mentally and physically as they realize that their dream of resettlement will not come true. When comparing myself with the children in the camp, I feel sorry that they have no chance of better schooling. But, they will never have the real feeling of being lost in the so-called "Promised Land"...

*Fleeting toward the future*



## A FOREIGNER ONCE AGAIN

*Fulayi Samiyombo, Angola*



Angola is unlike most other African countries where liberation was achieved through mere talk and the throwing of stones at colonial masters. To gain independence, men and women were required to take up arms and fight. Even after the granting of independence, war continued and, as a result, millions of Angolans are still in exile. I am one of the victims of circumstance.

The liberation struggle separated me from my parents at the age of three. I had gone to visit an uncle when Portuguese soldiers attacked the district where we lived and my parents went into exile without me.

In 1975, the Portuguese granted us independence and a few months later civil war broke out. This time the fighting was heavy compared to the liberation war. So, we could not merely hide in the bush and go home after a couple of days as was routine during the liberation war. One day it was rumored that the rebels were

to attack the district we lived in, but people never took it seriously. Then, one morning, around 4 o'clock, the whole district was on fire. All I can remember is that my uncle woke me up and gave me a set of clothes to carry and then we were off into the bush. Initially, we wanted to run to Lumbala from Kazombo where the other family members lived. After two days of walking in the bush, we met some other people who had come from far away. They told us that the situation was tense nearly everywhere so we decided to seek refuge in Zambia. We joined up with the people and headed for Zambia through the bush, without any road, path or proper direction. After walking for a week and crossing the border we came to some villages where we exchanged clothes for food. In the bush, we had lived on wild fruits and honey. At six years of age I could not walk at the same pace as the older people and so my uncle used to drag me. The villagers we met advised us to go to Zambezi. There we would be taken to where other refugees were. It took us another week to reach Zambezi. At Zambezi, we found the other refugees and some UNHCR agents who gave us food. A week later two trucks came and transported us to the Meheba Refugee Camp. There we were given food, clothes and some bedding by the Lutheran World Federation which was caring for refugees.

I met my parents again, in the compound.

At first, life seemed very normal as all I knew was eating, playing and sleeping. But, as time went by, after qualifying for eighth grade at a secondary school, I came to know that all was not normal. I was required to have a gate pass for the specific number of days that I would be at school although I already had a refugee identity card and an alien's card. For me, this meant that I had no freedom of movement. While at school, I was not allowed to contest for any post in the students' executive body. Nkumbi International College, as the name implies, had students from other countries who were not refugees and who were respected. But they used to call us all sorts of demeaning names and we often fought. Nevertheless, I was privileged to be sponsored by charitable organizations like the LWF and Young Men's Christian Association which enabled me to pay the high school fees.

On 13 December 1996 I was repatriated to Luanda. Upon arrival at the airport, I became yet another refugee in my own country. I don't know how to speak the official language, Portuguese, as my education was in English. Having spent twenty years in exile, I am only able to speak my mother tongue, so I'm being called a foreigner once again.



## TWO DECADES OF HELPLESSNESS AND MISERY, BUT...

Walter Manuel Mbundo Firmino, Angola

*After twenty years in exile, Walter Firmino is back in Angola as a returnee. His situation is problematic but "home is home," he says.*

Angola

*The Lord is my Shepherd. Even if I go through the deepest darkness or death, I will not be afraid because his rod protects me. I know that his goodness and love will be with me all my life and his house will be my home for evermore.*

(From Psalm 23)

Truly, my brothers and sisters, this story which I am about to narrate is about me but it is also a true reflection of the lives of many other Angolan children who have gone through terrible pain.

My little sister, my uncle, my aunt and I had stayed at home while my mother and father went to work. Around 10 o'clock we heard gunshots. Two hours later, the whole city of Luena was filled with very thick smoke. "Enemies are fighting," my uncle said. I wondered why they were fighting, using heavy guns to destroy everything, including themselves.

On the same day, 28 September 1976, around one o'clock in the afternoon, the streets appeared to me like a theater; the only difference was that this time I was not watching but acting myself. Dogs, cats, people and cars were running in different directions. Some were hit by bullets and fell down, screaming in pain.

Whoever said a young child does not distinguish good from bad would have proved himself very wrong that day. It was God for us all but each one for him-

self. The following day, I found myself in my aunt's village, which was many kilometers away, without my parents. I still don't know where my uncle and sister went. Fighting broke out in the village and the only solution was to trek into the thick forests. It was a long journey toward an unknown destiny.

Although my legs ballooned and my stomach was at the point of autodigestion, I continued walking with the crowd of people. Sadly and painfully, some gave in to great hunger and died, one by one.

### ANGOLA

The UNHCR is preparing for the return of more than 310,000 Angolan refugees from three major asylum countries. The LWF also is involved in the repatriation to Angola. More than 74,000 refugees have returned since June 1996. This repatriation started soon after a peace accord was signed in November 1994, ending 20 years of civil war. The operation will be the UNHCR's second major repatriation operation in southern Africa after the Mozambican repatriation.

The conflict in Angola left 600,000 dead and forced 3 million others to flee from their homes. More than 1.2 million of the country's 12.7 million people remain displaced inside Angola. Around 200,000 are refugees in Zaire [Democratic Republic of Congo] 96,000 in Zambia, 12,000 in Congo and 1,000 in Namibia. There are also 15,000 Angolan refugees in 32 other countries.

Over the past year, more than 59,400 Angolan refugees have returned spontaneously to their country. Within Angola, some 150,000 displaced people have returned to their original villages.

The return of Angolan refugees is expected to gain momentum once significant progress is achieved in the demobilization of troops and clearance of land mines on major routes.

Source: UNHCR



There was no funeral or burial for them. For those of us who survived, we ate anything on the way and we drank anything resembling water. Yes, I survived, and we reached Sikongo, the border town of Zambia. Food and water was provided by the UNHCR and the government of Zambia. My God! The sight of food and water brought life back to my family. At least walking, hunger and thirst was in the past.

From a comfortable life when I was driven to and from school, eating three good meals a day and playing with my mother and father, to nothing in Meheba Refugee Camp was a change difficult to cope with. But my psyche refused to give in to social and economic mental torture and I managed to withstand all types of delinquency.

Alcohol abuse, "dagger smoking" and very early marriage were common among young refugees for different reasons, one of them to forget their suffering. I went to school. The LWF and the UNHCR provided everything: books, pencils and a school uniform. A big thank-you!

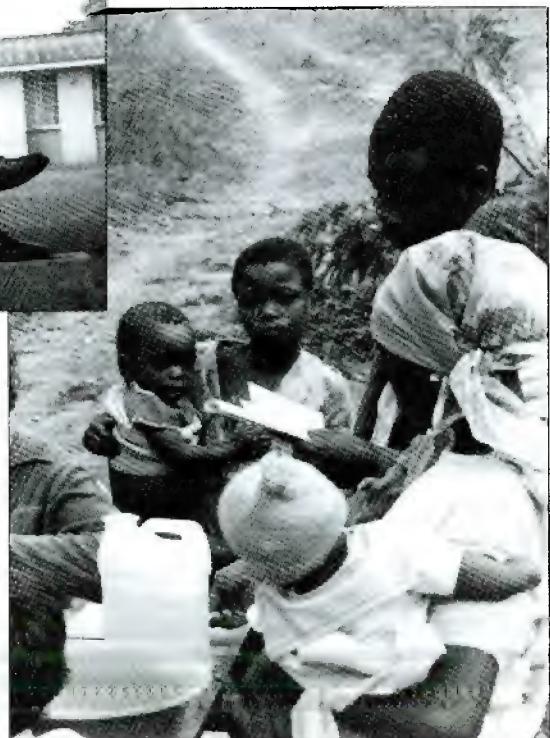
At secondary school, the LWF provided money for transport and other school supplies. There was a problem during school holidays. I spent my school holidays in Makemi Transit Center in Lusaka where the meals were simple and the portions small. I slept on the floor on a few mattresses provided by the LWF. Some refugees exchanged them for beer. After secondary school I went to college to study for a diploma in Clinical Medical Sciences. Thanks again to the LWF for the much needed support.

*After twenty years of pain, sorrow and misery, I am finally back home. I was four years old when I left Angola.*

Back home but without a home. I can't find my family. I had no communication with them when I was in Zambia. I am worried because guns can be seen all over. I am welcomed by many children without parents whose home is the streets of Luanda. My heart also goes out to the displaced people living in tents without basic necessities like toilets, water and proper shelter. I have nothing to do because I have no roots. I don't speak Portuguese so I can't communicate with my own people. Even worse, I don't know which village I come from or even my mother's full name. But home is home. It is better this way than to have killed or been killed. May God bless this land with peace, love, justice and order.



Walter Firmino while in Meheba refugee camp in Zambia



Angolan refugee children are vaccinated, in Meheba refugee camp in 1976.

Photo: Bertrand du Pasquier, LWF Archives



## PAYC UPDATE

*The Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC) in Bangkok is just around the corner. Around the world, 171 participants from 60 countries are preparing for their participation in the conference and in the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong.*

Rev. Amy E. Reumann will lead the Bible studies during the PAYC. Amy is 34 years old and a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Presently, she is working with parish ministry as a pastor of Luther Memorial Church in Madison, Wisconsin. The congregation is situated close to the University of Wisconsin which means that Amy is active in campus ministry with students and faculty. She has worked with young people, hunger, justice and multicultural issues, has led a teen-pregnancy-prevention program and is involved in local efforts to house homeless persons. Amy has previously worked in poor, multicultural inner-city congregations, work that she found very inspiring. "I love learning about and teaching Scripture and theology, with an eye to the experience and contribution of women," she says.



### THE BIBLE STUDY THEMES

*THE TIME IS FULFILLED: JESUS CHRIST  
THE TIME TO HEAR: THE WORD OF GOD  
THE APPROPRIATE TIME: JUSTICE  
THE TIME FOR WITNESS: FREEDOM  
A TIME FOR HOPE: APOCALYPTIC*

### AMY'S MESSAGE TO THE PAYC

"Fourteen years ago I attended the PAYC (in Budapest, Hungary), an event that changed my life, stretched my faith, opened new experiences and gifted me with lasting friendships around the world. Now, I am twice blessed with the joyful and awesome task of being a part of the 1997 conference.

The Bible studies are shaped around the topic of time with, daily, the themes of Jesus Christ, Hearing the Word, Justice, Witness and Apocalyptic. While I provide the contours of the study, the participants in the PAYC, together with the Holy Spirit, will create the content through small group discussions. I hope and pray that what I have given birth to during the cold Wisconsin winter will provide a basis upon which to share the Word of God with one another in Bangkok."



### WANDA'S MESSAGE TO THE PAYC

"The PAYC setting will give participants an extraordinary opportunity to meet youth from all over the world. It will be a time for dialogue, intense learning and sharing and will provide a chance for youth to create networks on both regional and international levels.

What are the challenges young people face in church and society? How can youth contribute more effectively to the lives of the churches? These are some of the issues that will certainly be addressed in Bangkok. I envision the PAYC as a time for celebration and strong affirmation that, in Christ, young people, also, are called to witness."



The PAYC will have two keynote speakers who will talk on the theme of the PAYC

**"BE NOT ASHAMED — CHRIST HAS SET US FREE"**

**Rev. Dr. Wanda Deifelt** is a professor at Escola Superior de Teologia in São Leopoldo, Brazil. She is responsible for the chair of feminist theology, is vice-president of the seminary and dean of the ecumenical post-graduate studies institute. Wanda, 34, is married and the mother of two daughters. She belongs to the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil.

The other main speaker at the PAYC is **Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit**, 47, from Thailand. He is Assistant to the President for Academic Affairs at Payap University in Thailand. Pradit's special fields of study are philosophy and religion, Christian ethics and Old Testament studies. He and his wife have two children, a girl and a boy. As for his involvement in youth work, he has worked in the Christian student movement and attended several major youth gatherings similar to the PAYC.

### PRADIT'S MESSAGE TO THE PAYC

"It is my great privilege to be part of the PAYC in Bangkok. The theme for the conference is a very challenging call which requires us to respond to the identity crisis confronting people of all races. Today, we face issues such as economic competition, globalization and the information super highway. Young followers of Christ of all backgrounds and denominations must also seriously address crucial concerns such as human rights which are connected to the value of life as originally created by God. The question of how the young generation may witness the love of God in Jesus Christ in our modern society is worth considering.

I am confident that our week of gathering in Bangkok will be a meaningful one. It will provide a common platform for us and we can reflect and share our experiences in witnessing the Good News in Christ to the people. I believe that through our mutual understanding and prayers we will share our vision revealed in Jesus Christ.

As a Thai Christian, I extend my warm welcome to Thailand to all the participants. I hope you will enjoy its beautiful nature and the sincere hospitality of the gentle Thai people. May God bless you and guide you until we meet in Bangkok."



## "FOUNDED IN CHRIST TO BUILD TOGETHER"

### LUCWA YOUTH CONSULTATION

*Youth from the Lutheran Communion in Western Africa (LUCWA) gathered in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon January 16-20 this year for a consultation on the theme Founded in Christ to Build Together. The LUCWA coordinates twelve Lutheran churches in western Africa.*

The participants expressed the need to form and extend the LUCWA Youth Network. They said they were grateful for the role LUCWA has played in the creation of the network. Youth work in West Africa often can be difficult because of lack of facilities and equipment and difficulties with transportation, they said.

Many young people also are attracted to Pentecostal churches. In addition, there often is a lack of education about the Christian way of life and its principles.

The participants in the consultation pointed out that for the network to be effective, there must be a sharing of information among LUCWA member churches and the youth network. They requested that each member church should have a representative in the youth network. An efficient network would facilitate communication and the sharing of information and experiences, promote interaction with youth of other faiths and bring youth's strength and vigor to the work of LUCWA.

The participants agreed on the need to set-up a sub-regional structure to coordinate and facilitate activities within the network. They said that the previous 1988 and 1992 youth consultations had achieved nothing because no structure was in place to ensure follow-up on the decisions and resolutions concerning youth.

Responsibility for funding of the network should be shared between the youth themselves, LUCWA's member churches and the LWF Desk for Youth in Church and Society, they said.

At the consultation, the participants also discussed several issues of concern to the youth. The spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) in general and HIV/AIDS in particular are serious challenges facing youth in the sub-region, they said. They agreed that sex education is of great importance in preventing the spread of STDs. Unemployment, cult activities and the wars which have torn the sub-region apart also were pointed out as great problems affecting youth.

The level of youth activities in the churches is good, according to the youth, but they asked that music, worship and Bible studies become a bigger part of

the activities. In the future they would like to see regional or sub-regional exchange programs for youth groups for issues such as music, sports, AIDS awareness, poverty and culture.

They would like to create resource centers for program exchange and training of youth leaders.

The participants said they feel the LWF is taking care of the youth and that they appreciate the role of the federation in LUCWA and the LUCWA Youth Network. They asked for increased LWF involvement in the activities of the Lutheran youth organizations in the sub-region through increased financial and technical assistance, resource persons and facilitation of communication and cooperation. They asked the LWF to translate information material into French which is widely spoken in the sub-region.

### RESOLUTIONS

Rev. Hamadou Salomon, youth director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, was elected as LUCWA Youth contact person and Rev. Nuhu Solomon, youth director of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria was chosen as assistant contact person. The contact person and the assistant should stay in office for two years.

The LUCWA youth delegates who attended the Ngaoundéré consultation will remain as the local LUCWA contact persons of the respective churches. It is intended that the contact persons maintain a close relationship with the LWF/Regional Office in Africa, in Nairobi, for effective coordination of activities and information.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

(HURINet)

More than forty experts from four continents have called on the international community to step up actions to protect the rights of children separated from their families due to war and other forced dislocations. They also urged the creation of an independent "watch" group to monitor repatriation and reintegration. The experts, leaders in international humanitarian law, child welfare and refugee relief, met in Bellagio, Italy from January 26-31, 1997, for their second conference in three years. The purpose was to highlight the special need of separated children to be united with their families or appropriate care-givers, from the initial crisis, through to their voluntary return to their original communities. Underscoring the obligations set by the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Bellagio Conference called on governments to set priorities which address the needs of separated children. It also appealed for greater cooperation and coordination between the United Nations agencies responsible for refugees and children — the UNHCR and UNICEF. Nongovernmental agencies, local communities and the children themselves should be involved as much as possible in planning and implementing the children's repatriation.



### WOMEN'S RIGHTS

(lwi)

A call to end the traditional practices that harm women and girls was issued by women from East Africa attending a seminar in Ethiopia, March 31 - April 4. The five-day seminar on Harmful Traditional Practices was held to raise awareness and develop a strategy to eradicate practices such as female genital mutilation, early childhood marriage, body markings, removal of babies' teeth, cutting out a part in the throat, and food taboos.

The seminar was sponsored by the office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in collaboration with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

Twenty-eight women leaders from six Evangelical Lutheran churches in Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, Eritrea, Nigeria and Ethiopia participated in the seminar at the Debre Zeit Management Institute. Most of the women were medical professionals serving their respective churches in different capacities.

Female genital mutilation is an extreme form of violence against millions of women and girl children. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 100 million women are affected by this practice that often results in a lifetime of adverse physical and psychological affects. Such practices violate basic principles which are included in several conventions such as the United Nations' Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention On the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention On the Rights of the Child.

A twelve-point communiqué passed by participants urges global mutual support to stop traditional practices that harm the life of mothers and children. Recommendations ask that churches organize a special day of prayer that focuses on the victims and the eradication of harmful traditional practices, that churches integrate teachings on harmful traditional practices and equality of all human beings in Christian education curricula, that the LWF/WICAS produce and distribute literature and audio-visual materials, and that churches find alternative income-generating activities for practitioners of female genital mutilation and for victims of early marriage. In addition, the participants asked that churches collaborate with other social agencies in the struggle against harmful traditional practices, and that churches recommend that governments pass laws against female genital mutilation.

### EDUCATION

(lwi)

The first faculty of the planned Lutheran Educational Institute of Santa Catarina University (IELUSC), Brazil, held its first entrance exam for nursing March 3-5, the Latin American ecumenical news agency ALC reported. Brazil's National Education Council approved the operation of the IELUSC nursing faculty on Dec. 4, 1996. The Faculties of Social Communica-



tion and Social Services are expected to be authorized soon. The IELUSC will operate in Joinville, the largest city in the state of Santa Catarina. The future university will integrate the educational network of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB). The university will depend on the IELUSC's expansion capacity, said Adair Fleck, director of the IECLB Department of Education. In order for an institution to become a university in Brazil it must include a minimum number of institutes in different disciplines. The IELUSC Nursing Faculty will be linked to three hospitals and a maternity hospital in the city. The faculty will include pedagogical training and graduates will have titles as nurse-teachers. Upon reaching the university level, the IELUSC will be the second post-secondary Lutheran formation center. The first is the Lutheran University of Brazil, which operates in Canoas, Porto Alegre, and is linked to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB). The majority of Brazil's Lutherans are concentrated in the States of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. The IELUSC will be the first post-secondary Lutheran education institute in Santa Catarina.

### **CHILD SOLDIERS**

*(lwi)*

The general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Ishmael Noko, has charged the US with hampering progress in negotiations on a worldwide ban on child soldiers.

In a Jan. 24 letter to President Bill Clinton, Noko criticized the attitude that US representatives took at a recent meeting of a UN working group dealing with children's rights. The working group, that began its three-week work on Jan. 6, discussed the wording of an optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The purpose of the protocol is to ban the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 in warlike conflicts. Some 200,000 children and young people, among them 10 percent girls, are recruited every year worldwide. The LWF favors a general ban on the use of children and young people under 18 years in international and national warlike conflicts, Noko wrote. The painful experiences of LWF member churches in war-torn countries, such as Liberia, Angola, El Salvador and Cambodia, has made the LWF a committed advocate of these concerns. The federation, not least because of its humanitarian aid work, is confronted time and time again with the grave physical and mental injuries to child soldiers.

It is all the more shocking that the US is one of the few countries not yet to have ratified the convention on children's rights, Noko wrote. For the LWF the plight of child soldiers has been an issue for many years. In June 1995, it started a campaign that drew attention to the problem worldwide. The LWF magazine *Development Education Forum* published an issue dedicated to the subject.

### **US STUDENTS**

*(lwi)*

Lutheran college students from across the US met Dec. 28-Jan. 1 in San Antonio for the Lutheran Student Movement-USA's (LSM-USA) annual national gathering. The event's theme was "A Line in the Sand: Borders, Boundaries and Belief". Through speakers, worship and small group discussions, 360 students and Lutheran campus ministry staff learned about boundaries drawn because of differences in culture, economics, gender and many other issues. Ralston Deffenbaugh Jr., executive director for the New York-based Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), spoke of concern for refugees being "very important for Lutherans". Deffenbaugh pointed out that in 1945, at the end of World War II, one out of every three Lutherans in the world was a refugee or displaced person. "The devastation of World War II and what effect it had on Lutheran people was a very important and informative fact when it came to the thinking of that generation of Lutheran leadership," he said. The LSM-USA is an independent organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church students at public, Lutheran and other private colleges and universities across the US.



## Letters to the editors

Recibo la revista desde 1990 periodicamente y debo reconocer que ha crecido en calidad durante este tiempo. Los aliento a seguir trabajando de esta manera con el objeto de mantener unidos e informados a miles de jóvenes luteranos alrededor del mundo. Con afecto,

*Juan Pablo Klenk, Argentina*

I have just decided to extend my sincere thanks for work well done. I want to pass my thanks to the LWF Youth Desk for the good information you always pass on to us through this wonderful magazine. I have been receiving *Youth Magazine* since 1995. God bless you in your preparations for the PAYC 1997 and the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. Keep it up and keep us informed. We are you and you are we.

*Joseph K. Moleofe, Botswana*

My attention was drawn to the article "Not to worship in vain" in the 40th issue of *Youth Magazine*. The topic, which was the theme for the Pre-Council Youth Workshop in Geneva, September 18-19, 1996, is very relevant to youth as members of the church and for spiritual well-being.

In our congregation, questions have recently been raised concerning the relevance of liturgy and the way in which it has been conducted. A matter of concern has been the sometimes mechanical manner in which the liturgy has been done. In many instances, the worship service is centered on the pastor. The members of the congregation are largely excluded. This has led to some young people leaving the Lutheran churches for the Pentecostal churches, which use a superficially excited way of worshiping.

In an attempt to close the gap, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria has introduced a lay preacher fellowship. This comprises lay people (including youth) who are involved in the preaching of the gospel, liturgy and Sunday school. The fellowship serves to bring people closer to the worship life of the church and also to close the pastor-congregation gap.

To solve this problem, the church also has set up a study committee on doctrinal matters. This committee is concerned with the study and review of existing Lutheran doctrine. The purpose of the committee is to evaluate some practices and to give members of the congregations a better understanding and appreciation of Lutheran worship in relation to Pentecostal practices which are finding expression in congregational life. I thank God that the youth is represented in this committee.

Central to this problem is the declining degree in teaching of the context, meaning and contents of the Lutheran liturgy. In particular, young people who have a shallow knowledge of the content of the liturgy are easily enticed by other modes of worship.

There is need for education of the congregation on the content and context of Lutheran worship. Involvement of young people in the worship life of the church is also necessary. I wish to suggest that the LWF Youth Desk include a program on worship as a priority item on its agenda. Thank you for bringing it to focus.

*David Udo  
LCN Youth Fellowship Nigeria*



## EVENTS IN 1997

*June 23-29*

**Second European Ecumenical Assembly** in Graz, Austria jointly organized by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). Theme: Reconciliation, Gift of God and Source of New Life. The assembly will bring together 700 delegates from almost every European church and several thousand other participants.

*June 22-27*

**Human Rights Visit to Bangkok and northern Thailand** to examine the serious problem of sexual exploitation of children in Thailand, a problem which was strongly emphasized in the 1996 Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. This program will be held in connection with the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC) in Bangkok, June 29 - July 5. Participants: an international group of young adults who will also take part in the PAYC.

*June 29 - July 5*

**LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC)** in Bangkok. This is the only global gathering organized under the auspices of the LWF/DMD Desk for Youth in Church and Society and takes place prior to the 1997 LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. Theme: "Be not ashamed, Christ has set us free" (2 Tim 1:8 and Gal 5:1). Participants are the youth delegates and stewards of the Assembly, participants from the region, ecumenical guests, resource persons and LWF staff. The aim of the PAYC is to prepare youth delegates and stewards for the Assembly; to evaluate the LWF Youth Program activities in the period 1990-1997; to identify issues of global concern to be worked on by the LWF Youth Program for the next period; and to build contacts within, and commitment to, the global communion.

*July 23-27*

**1997 National Youth Gathering of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** in New Orleans. The theme, River of Hope, ties in a strong Christian theme with the ambiance of New Orleans, the great river city.

*July 31 - August 5*

**European YMCA TenSing Festival "Hidak-Brücken-Bridges"**. The third TenSing Festival will take place in Kiskörös, Hungary with a festival choir, Bible studies, workshops, concerts, an excursion to the Puszta, a Gospel night, games and a party. The dream is to build a wide bridge which shall be a symbol of the meeting of 1500 participants. Cost: DM 170.— (DM 40.— for people from Central and Eastern Europe) + travel. Contact: National YMCA/KIE Hungary, Eva Magassy, Horanszky u. 26, H-1085 Budapest VIII, Hungary; fax: +36 1 267 05 87

*August 5-7*

**Pre-General Council Event for Youth** prior to the **World Alliance of Reformed Churches' General Council** August 8-20, in Debrecen, Hungary. Participants in the pre-council event will be under the age of 35. Local ecumenical guests are invited.

*November/December*

**Seminar on Churches and Human Sexuality** in Italy organized by the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe. The seminar will approach the theme from social, ethical and religious viewpoints with discussion on issues such as gender, concept of family, and sexual preference, from a youth perspective. The seminar also will analyze different approaches to human sexuality within Christianity.



## Looking for a pen pal?

*I am a boy of 14 years of age writing to you to ask for addresses of pen pals.*

Ebenezer A. NTSIAKOH  
Tamso Junior Secondary School  
P.O. Box 128  
Tarkwa W/R  
Ghana

*I'm looking for a pen pal from all over the world. I am 27 years old and a student of medicine at the University of Lubumbashi, Zaire [Democratic Republic of Congo]. My hobbies are: singing, reading books and novels, traveling, exchanging gifts... I would reply to letters in both English and French.*

Mr. Ilunga Nkasa TALWA  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zaire  
Cathedral of Epiphany  
P.O. Box 23294  
Kitwe, Zambia

*I am looking forward to a pen pal from Switzerland or any other European country. I am 21 years old. My hobbies are reading spiritual books and magazines, writing letters, sometimes watching football matches and reading novels. I reply to letters in English.*

Alemayehn CHALA  
P.O. Box 50278  
Addis Ababa  
Ethiopia

*I am a boy aged 17 born on 1 February 1979. I am looking for pen pals aged 18-25 of both sexes. I would like pen pals from the following countries: Sweden, the USA, Japan, Germany, Korea, Luxembourg, France, Austria, Singapore, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Great Britain or Chile. My hobbies are: watching TV, reading magazines, basketball, baseball, writing letters, exchanging photos, traveling and playing cards. I reply to letters in English.*

Arnold NYIKADZINO  
12169 Shavanhowe - CR  
Zengeza 4 (four)  
P.O. Box Zengeza, Chitungwiza  
Harare, Zimbabwe

*I am a young man aged 24 and single. I am a national youth committee member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi and I am a representative of the youth in the Karonga Parish Council. I am also a secretary of the Minenilondo preaching point. I am looking for pen pals from the USA, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Switzerland and Denmark. Please write in English.*

Anthony A.H. MASEKE  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi  
Karonga Parish  
P.O. Box 135  
Karonga, Malawi



*I'm looking forward to a pen pal from Europe, America, Asia or Australia. My hobbies are: reading books, singing, exchanging gifts and photos. I reply to letters in English.*

Tizita GIRMA  
P.O. Box 80153  
Addis Ababa  
Ethiopia

*I'm looking forward to a pen pal from Europe, America, Asia or Australia. My hobbies are: reading the Bible, singing, speaking about God, exchanging gifts and photos. I would reply to letters in English.*

Menbere ADAMU  
P.O. Box 80153  
Addis Ababa  
Ethiopia

## PUBLICATIONS

### AVAILABLE FROM THE YOUTH DESK

1. Report from Youth HIV/AIDS Workshop in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, May 1996 — *in English*
2. "Building Bridges: Towards an Asian Solidarity" — report from the Asian Lutheran Youth Conference in the Philippines, May 1995 — *in English*
3. HIV/AIDS brochure, produced by the HIV/AIDS Workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, May 1993 (jointly organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Youth Team and LWF Youth in Church and Society) — *in English, German, French, Portuguese and Spanish*
4. Resource book on HIV/AIDS (published jointly by the WCC Youth Team and LWF Youth Desk):
  - Making Connections — Facing AIDS — *in English*;
  - Face au SIDA — créons des liens solidaires — *en Français*;
  - Hagamos Frente al SIDA — creemos lazos de solidaridad — *en castellano*
5. LWF Pre-Council Workshop, Representation of Youth in the Nordic Churches, Kristiansand, Norway, 1993 — *in English*
6. "It is good for us to be here"/"Wir freuen uns, hier zu sein" — report/Bericht, Youth Conference/Jugendkonferenz, Budapest, Hungary/Ungarn, 1993 — *in English/auf Deutsch*
7. Copies of *Youth Magazine* nos. 38, 39 and 40



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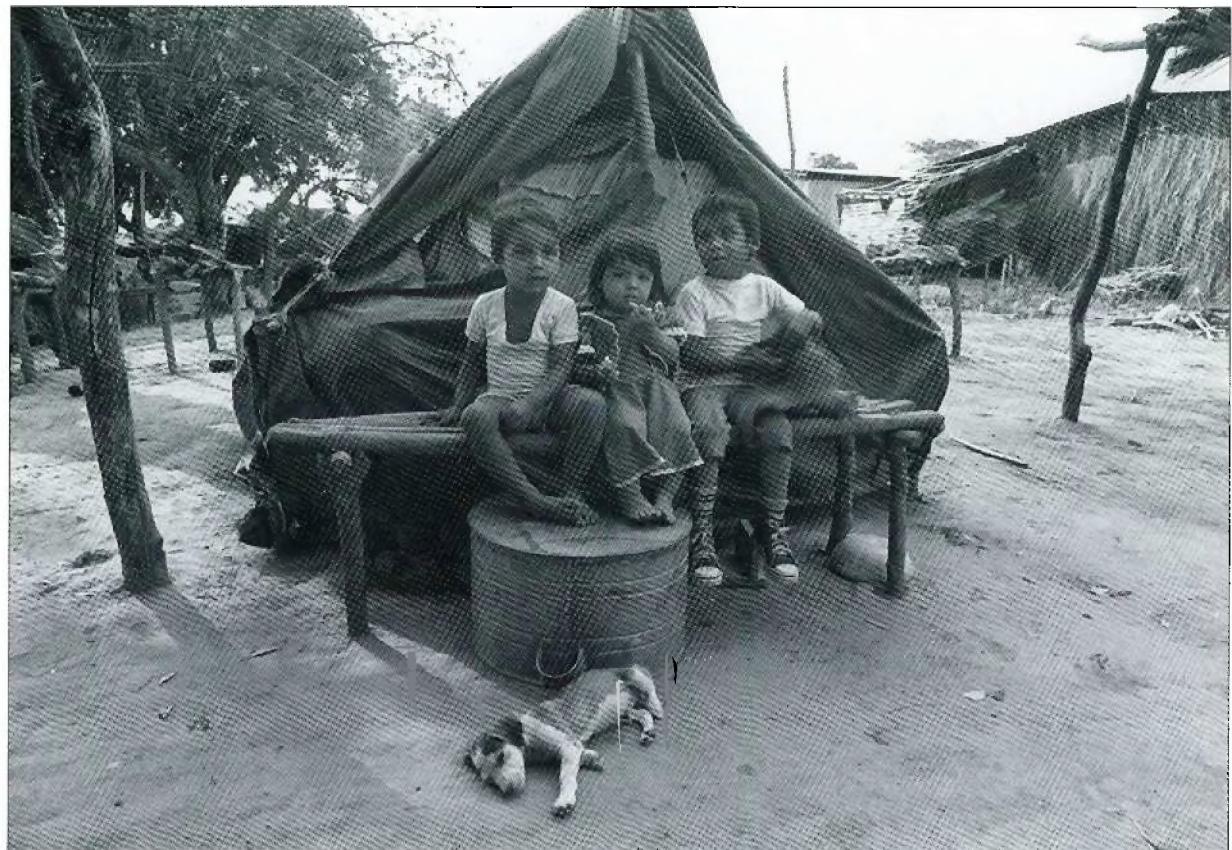
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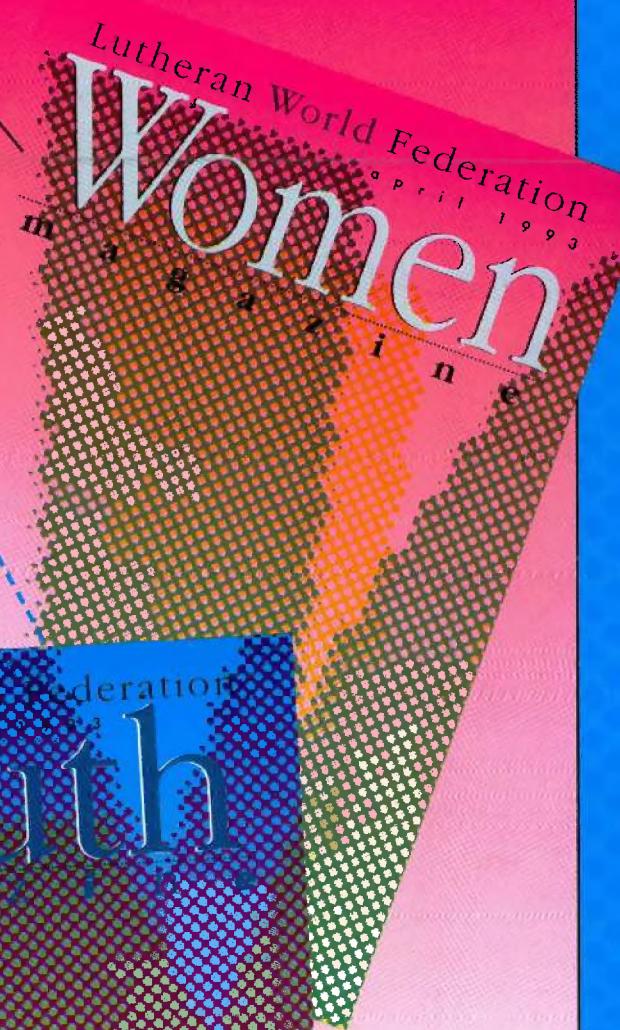
*Let mutual love continue.*

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

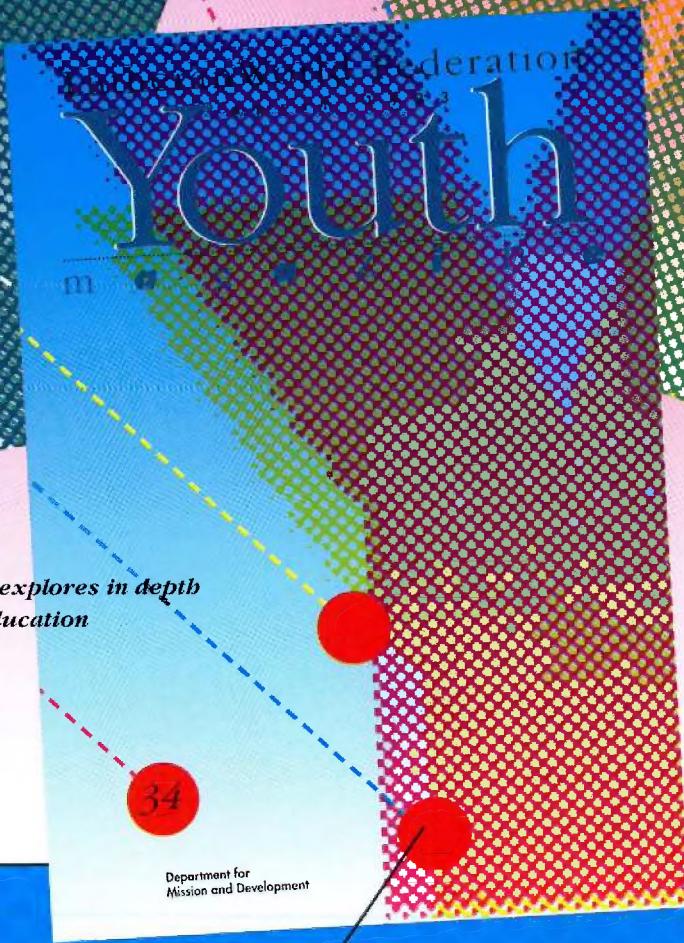
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